

Appendix1:

Local Government Boundary Commission for England Review of Council Size: City of Wolverhampton Council Size Submission

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Introduction

1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s (LGBCE) review of the City of Wolverhampton’s council size started in July, 2019.
2. The review was triggered due to 6 out of 20 wards being imbalanced across the city, therefore generating an unfair representation at local government elections. These six wards had a variance greater than +/- 10% compared to the average.
3. The LGBCE undertakes reviews of local authorities that have a variance greater than +/- 10% in 30% of wards or where one ward has a variance +/- 30%.
4. This submission presents the City of Wolverhampton’s ‘Council Size Submission’. This provides the LGBCE with the council’s view on the optimal

council size and supporting evidence across three broad areas. These areas are:

- Strategic Leadership – the role of councillors in decision making and council business demonstrating how responsibilities are distributed across the council.
- Accountability – the role of councillors in holding decision makers to account and to ensure that the council can discharge its responsibilities to outside bodies.
- Community leadership – how councillors represent and provide leadership in their communities and how this affects workload responsibilities.

Methodology

5. This report has been produced by a project team operating within Democratic Services and has been overseen by the Governance Committee under its remit to 'consider and advise the Council on elections and electoral arrangements, including boundary reviews, and polling districts, places and stations'.
6. To provide an evidence base for this report, a Councillor Survey was sent out to all 60 councillors. 76% of all councillors responded (92% of Labour councillors) to this work.¹ During the week commencing 13 January 2019, six councillors (from the majority and opposition groups) completed a Councillor Journal recording the time spent on council related business. The councillors that completed the journal were
 - a. A Cabinet Member
 - b. A chair of a regional body
 - c. And four back bench councillors (three labour; one conservative)

This cross-section of councillors was chosen to proportionally reflect the make-up of the council (the council is roughly five-sixths Labour and five-sixths non-executive). A copy of both the survey and journal can be found in appendix 3 and 4. The Councillor Survey and Journal have provided the predominant amount supporting evidence for the argument presented in this report.

Background about the city of Wolverhampton

7. Wolverhampton is the 18th largest city in the UK with a population in 2019 of 262,008. It has seen strong economic growth over recent years with the city being named the top city in Western Europe for job creation in manufacturing, building on our already-strong automotive and aerospace sectors. Whilst the

¹ Two councillors are currently signed off ill making the response from all active councillors 79% and 96% of Labour Councillors.

city continues to build on these existing strengths, it is also developing clusters in other key sectors whilst retaining a strong focus on investing in skills and matching local people to local jobs.

8. It is one of the top ten growing economies in the UK and is currently experiencing record levels of private and public investment, with £4.3 billion being injected into regeneration projects citywide. The city was the seventh most improved in the 2016-18 Demos-PwC Good Growth index.
9. The city is ideally placed at the centre of the UK's rail and road network, offering unrivalled connectivity to national and international markets. The investment of £150 million to redevelop our Interchange transport hub, incorporating a brand-new railway station, will further cement the City of Wolverhampton as a place open and connected for business.
10. Wolverhampton also has a thriving digital sector, with creative industries offering huge opportunities for our businesses. Recently, the University of Wolverhampton has made a £100 million investment into a new Centre for Architecture and the Built Environment, alongside the National Brownfield Institute. This will create an international centre of excellence for urban innovation and advanced methods of construction.
11. Wolverhampton is also home to a great cultural offer including a Premier League football team in Wolverhampton Wanderers, a unique live music and comedy venue in the Civic Halls, an excellent art gallery and the beautiful, Victorian Grand Theatre. Green and open spaces make up just under one fifth of the city with attractions including two large Victorian parks, Smestow Valley Local Nature Reserve, and two prime National Trust properties: Wightwick Manor and Moseley Old Hall.
12. The city is home to a thriving voluntary and community sector with individuals and groups dedicating their time to improve their communities. We value the contribution of the sector and recognise the critical role it plays in delivering the city's priorities. The sector generates over £140 million with over 12,000 volunteers.
13. Wolverhampton is diverse and cohesive. One third of our population is from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups and 19% of our residents were born outside the UK. There are around 90 languages spoken within the city. Wolverhampton's diversity is the fabric which holds our city together and our people are proud of our friendly and supportive communities. The city's population continues to grow as new communities decided to move here.
14. Wolverhampton is one of the fastest improving cities in the country, however, it still has social challenges to be overcome. 25.9% of children in the city live in poverty and the authority ranks 24th in the country for overall deprivation (1 being the most deprived), with many clusters of deprived small areas in the east of the borough. However, the achievement of an Ofsted rating of 'good' for the city's children services in 2017 (the only city in the West Midlands with a rating of good or higher) is a significant indicator that the city is on the up.

The Council

15. The council has six priorities, as outlined in the [Council Plan](#) 2019-2024.

These are

- a. 'Children and young people get the best possible start in life'
- b. 'Well skilled people working in an inclusive economy'
- c. 'More good jobs and investment in our city'
- d. 'Better homes for all'
- e. 'Strong resilient and healthy communities'
- f. 'A vibrant, green city we can all be proud of'

16. The Council also developed a [2030 Vision](#) that has several components including some of the following

- a. 'A thriving university city of opportunity'
- b. 'A place where we all play our part in creating a confident, buzzing city that's synonymous with ambition, innovation and inclusion'
- c. 'A city with world class public services that continually improve and have collaboration and co-production at their heart'
- d. 'A city which retains more of the value produced by its economy to benefit the whole city'
- e. 'A city which is serious about health and well-being'
- f. 'A city which is committed to sustainability for future generations'

The council's priorities and vision aim to support and improve the city.

17. The council has gone strength to strength in the last few years with its current council size. In 2017, the City of Wolverhampton won the prestigious 'Council of the Year' at the MJ awards. Even more recently, in 2019, the council won the 'Overall Council of the Year in Service Delivery' at the Association for Public Sector Excellence's awards.

Wolverhampton's demographics

18. Within the LGBCE's guidance, it is recommended to examine "demographic pressures" upon the local authority. Examples included were "distinctive age profiles, migrant or transitional populations", or whether large growth in the population is anticipated. Therefore, this section details recent and projected demographic trends.

19. The last boundary review undertaken by the LGBCE in Wolverhampton was in 2003. According to the Office for National Statistics' Mid-Year Population Estimates data series, between 2003 and 2018 (the latest year available), the number of people living in the city increased from 239,851 to 262,008; a

growth of 9.2%. The population of adults aged 18+ in Wolverhampton (the base population from which the electorate is drawn) increased from 184,458 in 2003 to 200,764 in 2018, a growth of 8.8%.

20. However, within the population of adults aged 18+, not all adults will be registered to vote. This is important because the LGBCE uses the number of electors per ward (people registered to vote) to determine “electoral fairness”. The LGBCE uses the concept of variance from the Wolverhampton average per ward and will intervene if over 30% of all wards have an electorate of +/- 10% from the average electorate for the authority. Figure 1 outlines the most recent data sourced from the LGBCE; Wolverhampton had six wards (30%) with a +/-10% variance, which was on the cusp of mandatory intervention. Figure 1 outlines the most recent position pre-review.

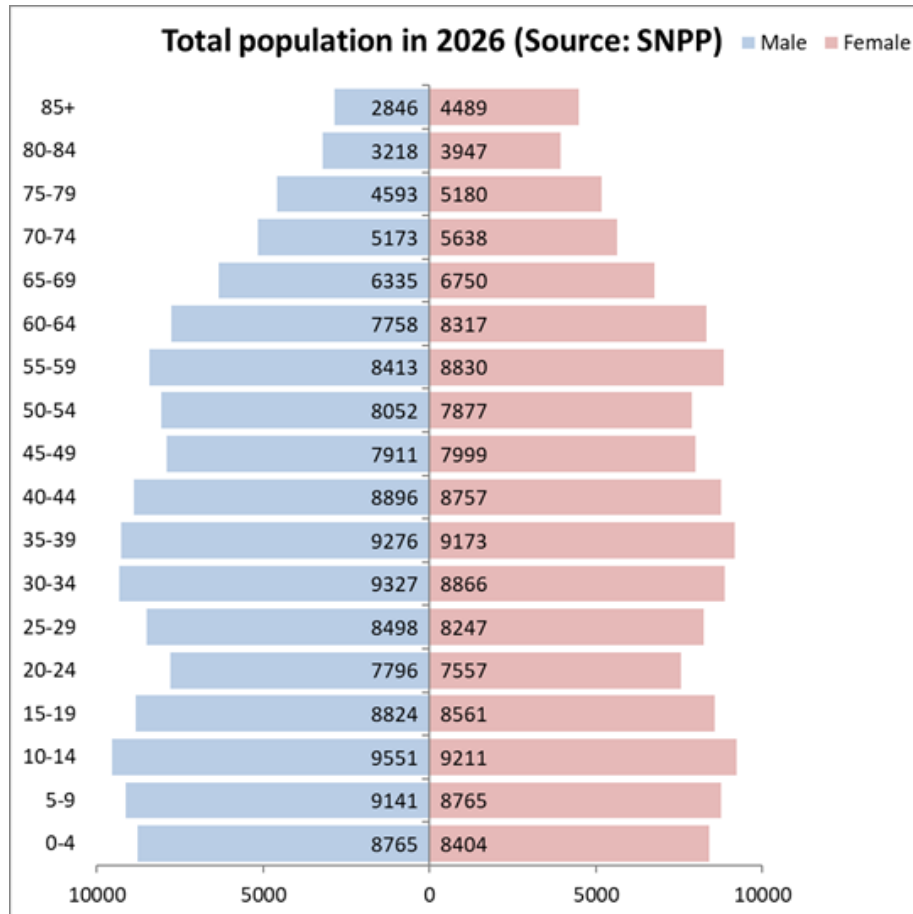
Figure 1 – Voter ratios in Wolverhampton for 2019 (LGBCE-sourced data)

| Ward | Electors | Voters Per Cllr | Variance from W'ton Voter Ratio |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| Bilston East | 10,017 | 3,339 | 12.80% |
| Bilston North | 8,652 | 2,884 | -2.57% |
| Blakenhall | 8,450 | 2,817 | -4.85% |
| Bushbury North | 8,954 | 2,985 | 0.83% |
| Bushbury South and Low Hill | 10,130 | 3,377 | 14.07% |
| East Park | 8,825 | 2,942 | -0.63% |
| Ettingshall | 9,973 | 3,324 | 12.30% |
| Fallings Park | 8,718 | 2,906 | -1.83% |
| Graiseley | 8,066 | 2,689 | -9.17% |
| Heath Town | 8,582 | 2,861 | -3.36% |
| Merry Hill | 9,079 | 3,026 | 2.23% |
| Oxley | 8,781 | 2,927 | -1.12% |
| Park | 7,806 | 2,602 | -12.10% |
| Penn | 9,886 | 3,295 | 11.32% |
| Spring Vale | 8,813 | 2,938 | -0.76% |
| St. Peter's | 7,349 | 2,450 | -17.25% |
| Tettenhall Regis | 9,348 | 3,116 | 5.26% |
| Tettenhall Wightwick | 8,844 | 2,948 | -0.41% |
| Wednesfield North | 8,617 | 2,872 | -2.97% |
| Wednesfield South | 8,722 | 2,907 | -1.79% |
| Wolverhampton | 177,612 | 2,960 | N/A |

21. For the LGBCE review, in order to ascertain the population size into the future, the starting point is the expected adult population drawn from the Office for National Statistics' 'Sub-National Population Projections' (SNPP). The most recent SNPP (2016-based) projects the city's population from 2016 until 2041, and the population in 2041 is projected to be 286,396. As there is steep population growth according to the SNPP until the early 2040s, the total

population of Wolverhampton is projected to be 270,940 by 2026, of which 64,629 people would be under 18. This leaves a total adult population, from which the electorate is drawn, of 206,311 by 2026.

22. Figure 2 – Total population in 2026, from the Sub-National Population Projections (SNPP)



23. Furthermore, the LGBCE requires an estimate of the proportion of the adult population registered to vote. The historical data for Wolverhampton between 2017 and 2019 yields an average ratio of 91% adult population to electorate, which has been used for the purposes of this forecast. This gives an estimated electorate via the SNPP of 187,740 electors by 2026, but this figure has been slightly revised for forecasting purposes, in light of other information about population growth external to the SNPP forecast (see the Electorate Forecasting submission for more details). Even using the SNPP's unadjusted 187,740 base, however, this would be a rise of circa 10,000 extra electors compared to the LGBCE's most recent data.

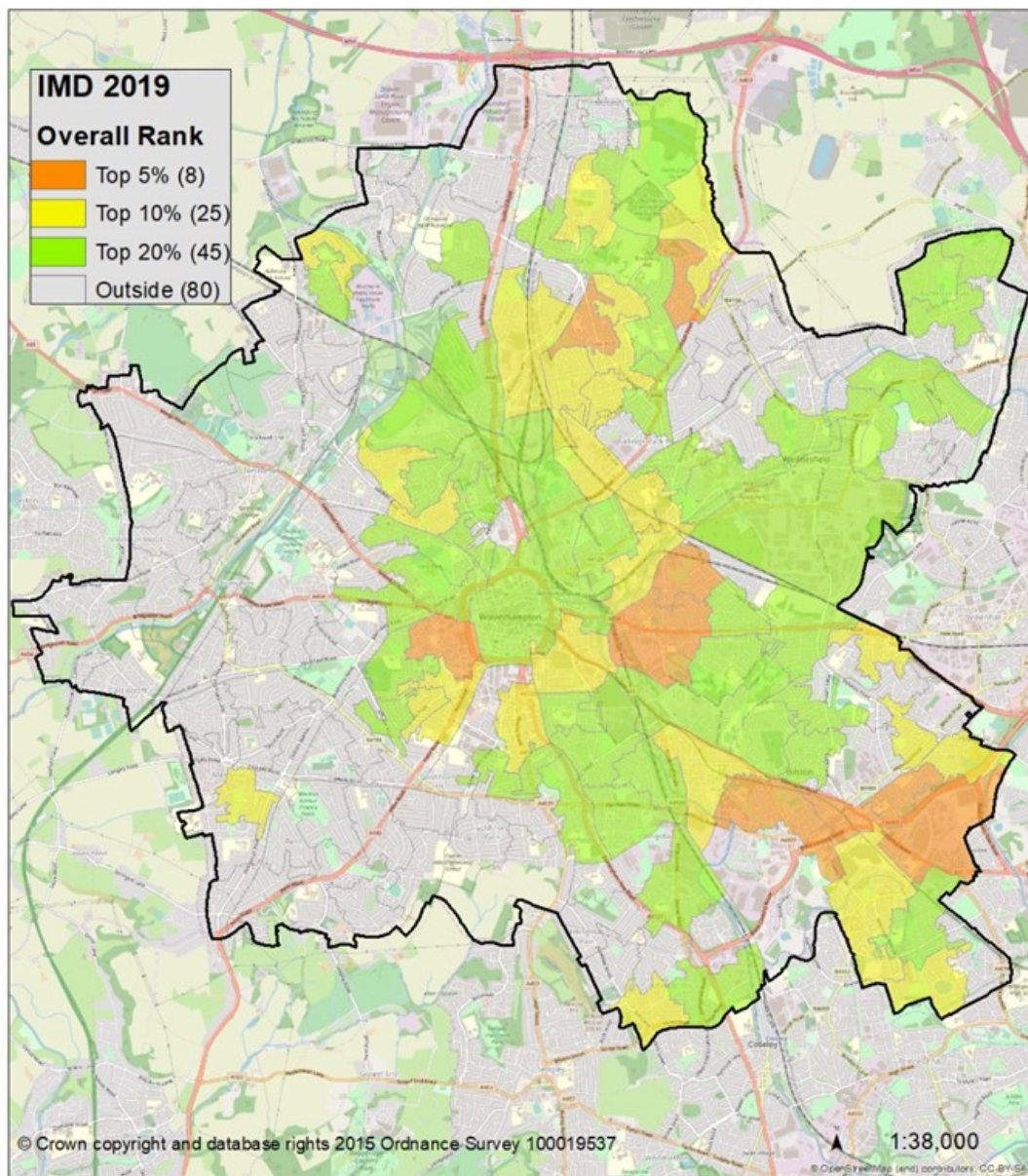
24. Part of the growth in extra electors is in the age profile of the population, with many present-day children who will become attainers (that is, aged 18+) by 2026. Overall, Wolverhampton has a younger population than the English average; the median age in Wolverhampton in 2018 was 37, compared to England's median of 39. Within Wolverhampton, there is variance in the

median age of residents per ward: the oldest ward is Tettenhall Wightwick (median age: 48) and the youngest ward is St Peter's (median age: 28.5).

25. A further reason for the increase in the electorate size is the increase in the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community (residents not of White British ethnicity), due to overseas migration and high fertility rates amongst this cohort. In the 2011 Census, 35.5% (88,525) of the city's residents were from a BME background, which is very likely to have risen subsequently. However, the distribution of people from BME backgrounds is not uniform across the city. For instance, the BME population is significantly higher than average in certain wards such as St Peter's (71.8%) and Blakenhall (76.8%).
26. Further evidence of the impact of migration is in the number of residents who don't speak English as their main language. The most recent data for this is also from the 2011 Census, where 26,032 residents aged 3+ (10.9% of all residents aged 3+) spoke a main language that wasn't English. The two most common non-English main languages were Panjabi (11,055 residents, 4.6% of all residents aged 3+), and Polish (2,458 residents, 1.0% of all residents aged 3+).
27. As stated, a high level of overseas migration into Wolverhampton contributed to the population rising since 2011, when the city had 249,470 residents at the time of the Census. By 2018, the city had 262,008 residents, an increase of 12,538 residents (5.2% increase). Substantial housebuilding has taken place over recent years, with 577 net additions to the housing stock in 2016/17, 796 additions in 2017/18, and 692 additions in 2018/19, which will have been a spur to population growth. There have been increased levels of housebuilding in recent years and this will impact the city's population size in the next few years.

28. Although the city's population is growing, Wolverhampton has considerable deprivation. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measures relative deprivation in England following an established methodological framework. There have been five releases since 2004. As the map in Figure 4 shows, 78 of the city's 158 LSOAs (49.4% of all LSOAs) are in the top 20% most deprived overall in England.

Figure 3 – Deprivation ranks for Wolverhampton's LSOAs



29. Further evidence of the challenges faced in Wolverhampton is the Claimant Count uptake, which measures the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed, based on administrative data from the benefits system. The claimant count has remained high since the recession of 2008-2010, and the position has worsened since then. In November 2019, the claimant count rate was 6.1% (England's average was at 2.9%), and the city ranked 3rd out of 317 Local Authorities.
30. Correspondingly, Universal Credit uptake for working-age people was also very high in recent months: in October 2019, the percentage of working-age people claiming Universal Credit due to unemployment in Wolverhampton was 7.5% (England's average stood at 4%). Even amongst employed working-age residents, 3.5% were claiming universal credit (England's average was 2.2%). Levels of child poverty (children in low-income families) are also higher than the English average, at 25.9% for Wolverhampton compared to England's average of 17% for 2016.

Wolverhampton's regional role within the West Midlands

The West Midlands Combined Authority

31. The City of Wolverhampton played a pivotal role in setting up the [West Midlands Combined Authority](#) (WMCA) moving powers from central government to locally elected politicians in the West Midlands. The WMCA is composed of 18 local authorities (Wolverhampton being one of the seven constituent authorities) and four Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). It was formed in response to the context of international, national and regional challenges including skills deficits, unemployment, austerity, increasing demand for public services and the need to improve connectivity within the West Midlands.
32. The purpose of the WMCA is to drive inclusive economic growth and support healthier, happier, better connected and more prosperous communities in the region through cooperation. To propel this economic growth, the WMCA is focused on the following key areas: economic growth, environment, health and wellbeing, housing and land, productivity and skills, public service reform and transport.
33. The creation of the WMCA meant that certain key regional functions (such as skills) were devolved down from central government to the WMCA. This offers significant opportunities for our city. However, this regional approach entails more responsibilities and duties for councillors in the region than historically. This is especially important considering Wolverhampton is one of the constituent members (i.e. with full voting rights) of the WMCA. The seven councils which are constituent members work together with the other partner bodies and the directly elected mayor to improve and develop the region,

particularly in regard to those strategic issues that cross local authority boundaries.

34. Central government has expressed ambitions to expand devolution still further. Jake Berry, the Minister of State for the Northern Powerhouse has written to the metro mayors stating the need to level up powers around the country's combined authorities. The ambition to build on devolution in ensuing years will continue to place further regional responsibility on Wolverhampton's councillors.
35. It should be noted that members of the council's opposition group do not hold positions within the WMCA. For this reason, the impact of the WMCA's creation only impacts ruling group councillors.

West Midlands Pension Fund (WMPF)

36. The City of Wolverhampton Council has been the administering authority of the [West Midlands Pension Fund](#) since the Local Government Act of 1985. The fund is not a legal body in its own right, and all contracts and assets are held in the name of the City of Wolverhampton Council. In April 2018, the Fund and several other Midlands based pension funds launched LGPS Central Limited in response to government requirements to pool investments. LGPS Central Limited manage a large proportion of the fund's assets. However, all other administration of the fund still sits underneath the City of Wolverhampton with the Chief Executive of Wolverhampton authority operating as the pension fund's Head of Paid Service, who delegates certain responsibilities to the Director of Pensions. The Fund provides pension services to over 313,300 members and over 620 public sector bodies in the region, including the seven districts within the West Midlands: Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Sandwell, Dudley, Solihull, Coventry, and Walsall.
37. Responsibility for the management and administration of the fund is delegated to the Pensions Committee which is made up of 20 trustees (including ten Wolverhampton councillors) together with a Pensions Board made up of 12 members which consists of six councillor and six employer representatives (including two Wolverhampton councillors).
38. Both the Pensions Committee and Pensions Board meet a minimum of four times a year. The role of the Pensions Board is to assist in the good governance of the scheme through the monitoring of Fund performance and adherence to statutory duties. It is not a decision-making body and does not hold a scrutiny function. The Pension Committee's role is wider. It is the decision-making body of the Fund. Its key duties include responsibility for compliance with legislation, determining and reviewing key documentation, monitoring the fund's investment activity and determining detailed management budgets.

Black Country

39. The Black Country is composed of four local authorities. Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton and sits in the heart of the West Midlands. It is home to over a million people, 430,000 jobs and generates £17.2 billion gross value added (GVA) per annum. The Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) brings businesses and public sector partners together to lead economic growth and establish a vision for the future.
40. In 2013, ABCA agreed that a Black Country Executive Joint Committee would be set up to lead the decision making forum for the Black Country City Deal and Growth Deal. Central government has devolved certain powers as part of these deals in 2014 in order to increase economic growth. The Leader of the Council and two further Cabinet Members are involved in the four bodies that have developed from this further example of devolution..
41. The [Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership](#) (BCLEP) aims to create conditions for enterprise to flourish bringing greater prosperity to the Black Country area. It facilitates and coordinates actions by the private, public and voluntary sector around education, skills, infrastructure, the environment and economic development. The Leader of the Council sits on the LEP's board with several other councillors involved in its sub-groups. The Leader of the Council also sits on the [Black Country Consortium](#) which is an intelligence and strategic team that cooperates with cross-sector partners to support the delivery of the Black Country's [economic strategy](#) .

Other regional/ national councillor involvement

42. The WMCA and pension fund exhibit two key areas of regional work that councillors are involved in, however, councillor's regional responsibilities go beyond this.
43. Councillors are involved in several national bodies. The Leader, Deputy Leader, Leader of the Opposition and Deputy Leader of the Opposition sit on the Local Government Association – Wolverhampton councillors are not involved in any sub-groups. Three other councillors are involved in other national bodies such as the Association for Public Service Excellence and Fire Services National College.
44. One councillor is also involved in supra-regional groups which is the Arts Council Midlands and the River Trent Regional Flood and Coastal Committee. This involvement further enhances the reputation of the City of Wolverhampton Council.
45. [Key Cities](#) is a policy group representing mid-sized, growing cities within the UK that operates as a united voice to champion stronger growth, inclusion and innovation. The council has a councillor representative on its board.
46. On a wider regional level councillors are involved in meetings around Birmingham Airport, West Midlands Employers Management Board, Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, West Midlands Regional Migration Partnership Board, West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority, West

Midlands Rail Ltd., West Midlands Crime and Police Panel, West Midlands Growth Board, Transport for West Midlands, Black Country Health and Wellbeing Group and the Black Country Historic Buildings Trust.

International involvement

47. The last few years has seen Wolverhampton take on a growing importance in the international community. In 2016, the City of Wolverhampton developed a city partnership with An Qing in China that several councillors, including the Leader, were highly involved in.
48. In June 2019, Wolverhampton played host to Shimla Municipal Corporation, located in Himachal Pradesh in Northern India, to share best practice work around waste, transport, climate change and the environment. In November, 2019, the Leader and Leader of the Opposition visited Shimla to build further relations between the two cities.
49. The 2022 Commonwealth Games will be held in Birmingham. It is hoped that several events may be held in Wolverhampton. The games will further add to the city and wider region's prominence. It is expected that councillors will have to play a role in the preparation for these games, especially in preparing the region's transport sector.

Growing involvement

50. As demonstrated, Wolverhampton's councillors have significant presence within the region and nationally. In total 26 councillors are involved in 40 different regional meetings/ committees/ boards. Nationally, nine different councillors are involved in ten different national meetings/ committees/ boards.
51. According to the Councillor Survey, over 30% of respondents spend over 12 hours a month on regional business (not including travel). 13% spend 30 hours on average a month on regional business, with 10% spending over 44 hours a month on average.²
52. The Councillor Journal results corroborate the data evidenced within the survey. The median respondent spent three hours that week attending regional work. In total, over 29.5 hours were spent by all six councillors on regional work which makes up 12% of their total hours on council business (this does not include travel which took up 13% of councillors' overall time that week). One journal respondent spent over 17.5 hours that week on regional business alone (not including travel which took up 11.5 hours of that councillors' time).
53. The evidence all demonstrates that regional working plays an important part within many councillors' roles, especially for councillors with executive

² Averages have been calculated calculated through a Program Evaluation and Review Technique analysis, commonly known as a PERT analysis, of the relevant survey question (appendix 3).

responsibilities. Regional work is only expected to increase as central government's ambitions for greater devolution are realised.

Wolverhampton's political context and governance model

54. The City of Wolverhampton Council currently consists of 20 wards, each of which is represented by three councillors (i.e. a total of 60 councillors). Apart from a period from 2008 to 2010, when there was a Conservative administration, the council has been Labour-controlled since 1994. Presently, 49 of the 60 councillors are Labour. The other 11 are Conservative. Councillors are elected by thirds, with elections held over a four-year cycle. The most recent election was in May 2019, and the next 'fallow year' is due in 2021.
55. The Council has operated the Leader and Cabinet model since it was introduced in 2000. At the present time, in addition to the Leader and Deputy Leader, there are eight Cabinet Members, each with their own portfolio of responsibilities.
56. The Cabinet meets in three formats. First is Cabinet (Resources) Panel, focusing on matters relating to finance, property, staffing and contracts (roughly meeting once a month). Second is Cabinet (Performance Management) Panel, focusing on the performance of the Council and the achievement of aims and objectives (meetings occur quarterly). Third and final is Full Cabinet, focusing on all other decision-making to ensure effective running of the Council (roughly meets once a month).
57. Each member of the Cabinet attends all three meetings. Cabinet meetings are open for members of the public to attend, and agendas, minutes, and reports are published on the Council's website. Each Cabinet Member is responsible for an area of the council's business and for overseeing its delivery in support of the Council Plan. Within their portfolio, each Cabinet Member is able to make decisions in respect of expenditure up to £250,000. Matters above that threshold must be considered by the whole Cabinet.
58. Executive Team meets nine times a year. It is composed of Cabinet Members and senior officers. It provides a private and informal space for policy to be considered and discussed between Cabinet Members and officers.

Table 1 – Membership, frequency and typical duration of Cabinet meetings

| Meeting | Members | Meetings | Typical duration |
|--|---------|----------|------------------|
| Cabinet | 10 | 10 | 1 hour |
| Cabinet (Resources) Panel | 10 | 11 | 1 hour |
| Cabinet (Performance Management) Panel | 10 | 4 | 1 hour |
| Executive Team (informal Cabinet) | 10 | 9 | 1 hour |

Wolverhampton's portfolios and responsibilities

59. The table below summarises the portfolios of the ten Cabinet Members. A more detailed breakdown of the delegations is available on the Council's website.

Table 2 – Portfolio and policy areas for each Cabinet role

| Cabinet Portfolio | Policy Area |
|--|---|
| The Leader of the Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Plan • City Partnerships • West Midlands Combined Authority • International, national, regional, and sub-regional leadership • External relations, Public Relations, and Reputation Management • New Communities and Migration |
| Cabinet Member for Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Money including Medium term financial planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. capital strategy (incl. schools) b. budget development process c. treasury management strategy • Council tax and business rates • Housing benefits and council tax benefits • Procurement and Commercialisation • Our Technology incl. ICT • Customer and Business Improvement Programme • Audit • Corporate risk • Human Resources Strategy |
| Cabinet Member for Governance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal • Democratic Services, Scrutiny & Councillor Support • Electoral Registration & Elections • Information Governance • Mayoralty • Equalities • Complaints and feedback • Our People Programme incl. Organisation Workforce Development • Our Data Programme incl. Insight and Performance • Health and Safety |
| Cabinet Member for Education and Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Years • School standards and attainment • Strategic School place planning |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School admissions • 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability • School governance • Home to school transport • Skills and employability • Post 16 School Education provision • Adult Education • Higher and Further Education (incl. universities) • Commercial services to schools • Health and wellbeing for schools |
| <p>Cabinet Member for Children and Young People</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s safeguarding incl. prevention of exploitation • Children in need and in need of protection • Children and young people in care and care leavers • Corporate parenting • Early intervention, prevention and specialist services • Children’s Transformation work (incl. specific funded programmes) • Education inclusion incl. behaviour, attendance and elected home education • Youth Offending • Children and young people partnership working • Link for children and young people’s health incl. disabilities and emotional health and wellbeing • Children’s Services commissioning • Children and Young People’s participation and engagement |
| <p>Cabinet Member for Adults</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social care for older people, disabilities and mental health • Adult safeguarding • Carer support • Welfare rights • Wolverhampton Information Network • Better Care Fund and Integration • Quality and Care provision monitoring • Adult care commissioning & user engagement • Financial Assessments |
| <p>Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing Ill Health and reducing Health Inequalities • Starting and developing well • Healthy Life Expectancy • Healthy Ageing • Community safety & community cohesion • Emergency Planning, Resilience and business continuity • NHS Partnerships • Voluntary sector liaison • Community Engagement • Public Health Commissioning |

| | |
|---|--|
| Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Housing Strategy and Housing Policies • City Prevention of Homelessness Strategy • City Housing Needs & Affordable Housing incl. Temporary Accommodation • City Private Housing Services incl. Enforcement and Civil Penalties • Safer Homes incl. National Residential Building Safety Programme • City Residential Landlord Services – Wolverhampton Homes Arms Length Management Company • City Residential Landlord Services – Tenant Management Organisations Right to Manage Tenant Organisations and Cooperatives • City Housing Company – WV Living Ltd • City Housing Development Strategy • Our Assets Programme Incl. City Strategic Asset Plan (incl. Education Assets) • City Asset Management Plan (incl. Education Assets) |
| Cabinet Member for City Economy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City development • City Planning, incl. policy, development control, building control • Supporting City businesses • Stimulating Inward investment • Cultural and Creative economy incl. arts, tourism and culture • Economic growth and inclusion partnerships • Libraries and Community Hubs • City Marketing • City Events Programme |
| Cabinet Member for City Environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Transportation • Operational Transportation incl. highways management and maintenance • Waste management strategy • Street cleaning • Grounds maintenance, parks operations, country parks operations • Markets • Public protection and consumer protection • Licencing • Parking Services • Bereavement • Registrars • Coroner • Fleet management • Sustainability • WV Active • Customer Services |

60. Cabinet Members attend weekly briefings with senior officers about their portfolios, which typically last one to two hours. The purpose of the briefings

are to ensure that Cabinet Members are aware of any current issues and developments within their area of responsibility, as well as to discuss matters for decision in the portfolio, either by the individual Cabinet member or the Cabinet as a whole.

61. From the Councillor Survey responses, it was mentioned by several Cabinet Members that this further executive responsibility greatly added to their workload. One Cabinet member quoted, *“There is a heavy workload as a Cabinet Member. Being a councillor is a 24/7 role”*. A recently-appointed Cabinet Member mentioned that the biggest impact on their role’s time was their Cabinet Member responsibilities. Furthermore, Cabinet Members commented that the introduction of many new regulations such as data protection, equalities, safeguarding have increased the workload for many Cabinet Members in relation to their portfolios.
62. Other duties for Cabinet Members include being present at Full Council. Full Council meets eight times each year, with the budget-setting meeting taking place in March. Full Council sets the strategic direction for the organisation, determining its priorities and key strategies, and allocating financial resources to enable their delivery. The council then oversees the implementation of its policies and strategies, having delegated operational responsibility to the Leader and Cabinet (and other committees as appropriate). Council meetings are webcast, as well as being open for members of the public to attend.

Table 3 – Membership, frequency and typical duration of Full Council meetings

| Meeting | Members | Meetings | Typical duration |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Full Council | 60 | 9 | 1.5 hours |

Scrutiny at City of Wolverhampton Council

63. The role of scrutiny in the council is vital to ensuring that decision makers are held to account and that policy and strategy are formulated carefully. It is critical to ensuring that the council’s work has positive influence on the residents of Wolverhampton.
64. Scrutiny at the council functions in the following manner: Cabinet Members and those with delegated authority are called to meetings of the Scrutiny Board, a relevant scrutiny panel or review group in order to provide information on proposed decisions. Decision makers are also subject to being called in following the Council’s constitution. Decision makers may be questioned or required to provide information on strategies or policies after implementation to monitor progress and ensure accountability. This ensures that decision makers are held to account. In order to make the role of scrutiny both more accountable and accessible, some scrutiny meetings are held in community locations.
65. The Council has one Scrutiny Board, with six panels underneath it. Each of the panels are scheduled to meet five times a year and extra meetings are

called when required (see table 4). There are also several task and finish review groups that carry out in depth scrutiny into a specific function or topic, lasting between six months and a year. Their function is to consider a topic or question in detail and to make recommendations to Cabinet. Councillors may be expected to attend one to two meetings a month on average. Each scrutiny panel has approximately 12 councillors with task and finish groups having between five to seven councillors.

66. The number of scrutiny committees within the authority has not changed since 2013. The format was designed to enable the majority of non-executive councillors to be involved in the decision-making process and strategy formulation. The current system also provides robust representation from a wide geographical area within the city. This also allows for political balance to be achieved and a suitable degree of diverse debate to take place.

Table 4 – Membership, frequency and typical duration of Scrutiny meetings

| Meeting | Members | Meeting s | Typical duration |
|---|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Scrutiny Board | 13 | 8 | 1.5 to 2 hours |
| Adults and Safer City Panel | 12 | 5 | 1.5 to 2 hours |
| Children, Young People and Families Panel | 17 | 5 | 1.5 to 2 hours |
| Our Council Panel | 12 | 5 | 1.5 to 2 hours |
| Health Panel | 12 | 5 | 1.5 to 2 hours |
| Stronger City Economy Panel | 12 | 5 | 1.5 to 2 hours |
| Vibrant and Sustainable City Panel | 12 | 5 | 1.5 to 2 hours |

67. The Council is currently reviewing its governance structures regarding scrutiny and backbench engagement, it is intended that the Council will receive a paper on 1 April 2020 on proposed amendments to the Council's constitution detailing how we can increase the involvement of non-executive councillors in policy development and formulation, through the introduction of Cabinet Advisory Groups and to ensure that scrutiny is more effective and is focused on key issues. This was set out in a presentation that went to Governance Committee on 28 February 2020 and can be found on the Council website.

Delegated functions at City of Wolverhampton Council: Planning

68. Non-executive functions (such as planning or licencing) are delegated by the council to the relevant regulatory committees. The work of these bodies is outlined in more detail below. A range of routine matters are delegated to employees to facilitate the smooth day-to-day running of the council. These are outlined in detail in the constitution.

69. Due to the growth in external investment leading to multiple large infrastructure projects going ahead within the city, the role of planning in Wolverhampton has never been more important.

70. Councillors determine roughly 5% of all planning applications with there being about 100 applications every two months. Five or six of these go to Planning Committee. The criteria for whether a planning application is considered by Planning Committee is that has 6 or more objections to it and/ or there is a resident that wants to speak for or against the application.

71. Due to the city being very compact, there is a single council wide Planning Committee with no area committees. Cabinet Members do not serve on the planning committee, only councillors with non-executive responsibilities. On average the planning committee takes up 8 hours of a councillor's time every two months (4 hours of preparation; 4 hours attending site visits and the meeting) or 48 hours a year.

Table 5 – Membership, frequency and typical duration of Planning Committee meetings

| Meeting | Members | Meetings | Typical duration |
|--------------------|---------|----------|------------------|
| Planning Committee | 12 | 6 | 2 hours |

Delegated functions at City of Wolverhampton Council: Licencing

72. Licencing authorities are responsible for protecting people's health, safety, and wellbeing as well as the environment and amenities. Supporting these objectives requires a regulatory regime that directs a clear set of service standards and offers advice that supports businesses and residents to thrive and grow. This is the role that licencing plays within the city.

73. There are two licencing committee that overarch the Councils licencing authority function.

- The Statutory Licencing Committee which predominantly includes the licencing of activities in connection with alcohol and gambling.
- The Non-Statutory Licencing Committee which includes taxi's, private hire, street trading amongst many other licencing/permitting/registration schemes.

There are clear policies set by the licencing committees that underpin the licencing regime with a clear set of service standards that offers advice that supports businesses and their growth aspirations while protecting residents and preventing the proliferation of crime.

74. The delegation function for Statutory Licencing is set and cannot be delegated down further to Officers. The Non-Statutory Licencing Committee is able to delegate decisions to Officers. The scheme of delegation provides for Officer to make the majority of decisions, which keeps the Councillor targeting on the important policy elements of Licencing.

75. The two licensing committees have sub-committees who determined applications for licence as detailed in the schemes of delegation

- The Statutory Licensing Sub-Committee hears reviews of premises licence brought, usually, by the Police. It also hears applications where an objection has been made. This is set out in legislation and cannot be delegated to Officers.
- The Non-Statutory Licensing Sub-Committee hears and determines private hire driver applications, where Officers have referred them to the Sub-Committee following an initial hearing. The Sub-Committee also hears and determines licences/permits where the police object to the grant of licence.

76. As demonstrated by Table 5 (concerning Planning), statutory and non-statutory committees take up a minimum of nine hours every year for each of the 12 councillors. However, for three additional councillors, the statutory sub-committees can take up over 105 hours every year. 90% of these meetings are attended by the same five councillors in rotation. Sub-committee meetings are predominantly rostered with five core councillors taking part. Committee meetings have a standing membership with sub-committee meetings being ad-hoc. Table 7 below evidences the commitment and time taken for the various licencing panels within the council.

Table 7 – Membership, frequency and typical duration of Licencing meetings

| Name | Members | Meetings | Typical duration |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Statutory Committee | 12 | 6 | 30 minutes |
| Statutory sub-committee | 3 | 31 | 3.5 hours |
| Non-statutory committee | 12 | 6 | 1 hour |
| Non-statutory sub-committee | 3 | 4 (in 2018-19) | 3 hours |

77. The situation with the council's licencing department is extraordinary compared to all other local authorities. This is due to the extremely high number of taxi licences the City of Wolverhampton processes, which are dealt with by non-statutory committees that solely address taxi licencing. Table 6 shows the elements of licencing which are covered by statutory committees (excluding taxi licences).

Table 6 – Elements of licencing covered by statutory committees

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| Trading standards | Animal welfare |
| Premises licenses | Market stalls |
| Temporary events | Skips |
| Personal licenses | Sex shops |
| Gambling & gaming licenses | Street trading |

Delegated functions at City of Wolverhampton Council: Taxi Licencing

78. Since the geographical deregulation of taxi licencing, the City of Wolverhampton Council has led the way nationally in the delivery of taxi licencing. As of January 2020, the Council had licensed 17,387 taxis. This is vastly greater than our neighbouring authority, Walsall, which licenses 1,129 drivers. Even Birmingham, a city four times the size of Wolverhampton, only licenses 4,000 taxis. This huge growth in taxi license applications and reviews has required the Council to change its approach.
79. Officers now have delegated authority from sub-committees to make decisions instead of councillors. This is necessary as the amount of reviews and hearings requires the equivalent of two full time posts (spread across a team of employees). There are over 500 hearings a year for new applications.
80. If the licencing team did not have delegated authority there would be a sub-committee every day. Due to delegated authority, there are on average four non-statutory sub-committees a year with six full non-statutory committees. It should be noted that the number of non-statutory sub-committees that occur in a given year may vary. Due to this process, councillors can spend more time on ward and executive matters. It also enables the council to have the most efficient taxi licencing application process in the country.

Other important meetings / working groups attended by councillors

81. Aside from the examples cited of Planning and Licencing, there are other boards and committees which necessitate councillor representation. These are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8 – Membership, frequency and typical duration of other important meetings

| Meeting | Members | Meetings | Typical duration |
|--|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Equalities Advisory Group | 8 | 4 | 2 Hours |
| Climate Change Advisory Group | 8 | 3 | 1.5 Hours |
| Councillor Development & IT Advisory Group | 7 | 4 | 1 Hour |
| Health and Wellbeing Together Board | 7 | 4 | 2 Hours |
| Corporate Parenting Board | 10 | 6 | 1.5 Hours |
| Children and Families Together Board | 3 | 4 | 2 Hours |
| Governance Committee | 9 | 7 | 1 hour |
| Standards Committee | 5 | As required | 2 hours |
| Audit and Risk | 10 | 5 | 2 hours |

External Partnerships

82. As previously stated, the Council has a strong relationship and involvement with the WMCA. The Leader of the Council sits on the West Midlands Combined Authority, the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership, and the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership.
83. There are also a number of boards, groups, and organisations in the city which councillors serve on that operate or contribute to addressing inequalities and deprivation. These include Health and Wellbeing Together Board, Children and Families Together Board, Inclusion Board, Wolverhampton Equality and Diversity Partnership, Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together Board, Safer Wolverhampton Partnership, and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).
84. Councillors are required to serve on an organisation's board if the organisation receives over £75,000 in Council funding, or if the board is of strategic importance to the Council. Examples of these boards include Citizens Advice Bureau, Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council, Age UK, Credit Union, and The Haven women's refuge.
85. Councillors are also invited to serve on various partnership forums. These are led by either business or voluntary sector partners and councillors attend either as invited councillors or as non-voting councillors, so attendance is optional. Examples of these partnership forums include Learning Communities, Wolverhampton Equality and Diversity Partnership, Inclusion Forum, Wolverhampton One Interchange Forum, and Wolverhampton Domestic Violence Forum. Further details on councillor involvement in external bodies can be found [here](#).
86. [Partnership and Communities Together](#) (PACT groups) are a further key part of councillors' roles in the wider community. PACT is a partnership meeting which gives residents of Wolverhampton an opportunity to regularly meet with their Neighbourhood Safety Coordinator, local policing team and other local partners with the aim to tackle crime and community safety concerns at a local level. The group meetings take place in each ward every two months. Residents can meet with local police, their neighbourhood safety coordinator and councillors. They are used to facilitate discussion and cooperation with residents.
87. [Wolverhampton for Everyone](#) (WfE) was set up in 2019 as a partnership between the council, voluntary sector and communities. Its vision is to provide opportunities to co-design and co-produce, developing the long-term resilience and capacity of our communities as the council continues to manage growing financial pressures. It aims to unlock a people-powered city. There is a Councillor Champion for Wolverhampton for Everyone – see paragraph 92 and 93 for information on Councillor Champions. This councillor

provides further support for the organisation .They also work out in the community acting as an ambassador to raise the profile of WfE.

Councillor Champions

88. Councillor Champions complement the responsibilities of portfolio holders, and other Councillors with designated responsibilities. They help raise the profile of their relevant issues, work amongst partners, offer support and drive forward the Council's agenda on the issue. Champions also provide reports to Scrutiny Board every six months.

89. There are currently four Councillor Champions. These are

- a. Councillor Champion for Equalities
- b. Councillor Champion for Digital Innovation
- c. Councillor Champion for Climate Change
- d. Councillor Champion for Wolverhampton for Everyone

Wolverhampton Homes

90. [Wolverhampton Homes](#) was set up in 2005 as an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) of the City of Wolverhampton Council. Wolverhampton Homes now manages over 22,000 homes on behalf of the council with its key mission being to "help people get on in life."

91. Wolverhampton Homes has a board of directors composed of 12 members. Four of these members are councillors. The board act as ambassadors for the ALMO and have ultimate responsibility for the organisation making important strategic decisions. The board meets four times a year.

Community Involvement of Councillors

92. As stated in the methodology, the responses to the Councillor Survey and Journal have provided the majority of data and evidence presented within this section. Figures five, six, seven and table nine exhibit some of the evidence taken from the Councillor Survey and Councillor Journal.

Engagement with residents

93. The LGBCE ask that submissions demonstrate how councillors provide effective community leadership, and what support in turn the council offers to assist councillors in this role. The Councillor Survey exhibits that councillors most prefer face to face engagement with electors. 61% of councillors listed face to face interaction at council offices and residents' homes in their top two methods of engagement. Over 50% of councillors then listed face to face interactions at their surgery within their top three methods of engagement. The Councillor Journal (see Figures 5 and 7) highlights that the six councillors spent 34% of their cumulative time on community/ case work with the median respondent spending 15 hours that week. The majority of this time involved councillors interacting with residents on the street, or in community meetings.

94. In the Councillor Survey, communication through emails and telephone calls ranked joint third as the most important method of engagement with electors. This was followed by community meetings, then newsletters. Respondents to the survey could also list other methods of engagement that they used. Websites, local radio and bumping into residents whilst out shopping were mentioned here. In total 70% of respondents ranked engagement at community meetings as being the third to sixth most important form of engagement.
95. Within this 'other' section, eight other councillors chose to highlight the importance of 'Down Your Way' (DYW) in engaging with electors. DYW are posters that councillors personally hand out to all ward residents within a certain locality. Residents then put the posters in their business or home windows at certain times of the week. A ward councillor will then walk to the locality at a given time and if they see a DYW poster, they will knock on the door and ask the resident what they want to discuss. 5,000 of these posters are given to each councillor every year. Councillors that use this method of engagement often pick up additional casework whilst visiting residents."
96. Social media was ranked by 51% of councillors as either the least or second least method of engagement with residents. The journal exercise corroborated this with social media taking up a median of just under an hour a week of the median respondents' time and 7% of total hours spent working by councillors. However, councillors noted that social media and other online technology (such as personal websites) were growing in importance as a method of engagement.
97. Concerning social media, one respondent stated that an event now needed posters and leaflets to be designed then distributed first followed by online events being created and published on social media s adding to their workload. Two respondents commented that *"more inquiries and case work will develop through social media"* and *"The increased use of social media platforms has, in my opinion, led to an increase in casework referred by councillors in other wards."* Others mentioned that the rise of social media meant that councillors were expected to respond to residents far quicker. It appears likely that social media will play a role of growing importance in councillors roles in the future.
98. The Youth Council, which meets up to twice a month provides an opportunity for councillors to engage with young people in the city. 15 councillors are also governors at 19 local schools which provides a further formal method of engagement with the city's young people.

Developing a place-based approach

99. The council is working towards a place-based model, which builds upon the commitment made in the Public Health Annual Report 2018/19, where a place-based approach is defined as "a very localised action with our

neighbourhoods or communities³". This will inevitably result in councillors having a greater involvement as they work in and with communities to identify and address local issues.

100. Ward walks are one example of the place-based approach, and entail the Chief Executive and senior officers visiting the ward alongside councillors, to see what needs improving in each ward (including visible litter and detritus, fly tipping, graffiti, anti-social behaviour and other important concerns of residents). Issues and resident concerns are fed back to officers to be actioned and addressed.
101. More broadly, by moving towards a place-based approach to addressing local problems will necessitate the active involvement of councillors to be successful. This is because local intelligence and knowledge held by councillors, is crucial to understanding which streets, communities and areas are particularly needy. Once the needs are understood, they can be met using the assets, resources and facilities of the community and the council, by means of co-production.
102. An example of this would be where the walks have led to task and finishing groups being set up to identify underlying issues within communities. This has enabled the treatment of the underlying causes as opposed to just the 'symptoms' empowering communities to be resilient and sustainable. For example, in Graiseley ward, the ward walk led to a task and finish group developing a partnership action plan owned by the community. This included an action to run a community clean up day which has since inspired further action within the community that has not been council-led.
103. As part of Wolverhampton for Everyone (see paragraph 82) the ward fund initiative was implemented as a one year pilot. This has further enhanced the place-based approach. The initiative provides each ward with a £10,000 pot. Ward councillors then distribute this funding to empower community work and other beneficial schemes within their wards. Examples of activity generated from the ward funds includes facilitation of community events and fronting of community events such as Wednesfield's 'Wodenstock Festival'.
104. Simultaneously with the ward funds initiative, the role of 'Ward Director' was instigated, in which senior officers cover four wards each. This provides a simplified route for councillors to engage with senior officers. They examine what the key concerns are and what spending is necessary to improve the area alongside the councillors themselves. This process then aids in distributing ward funds and enables senior officers to better support ward councillors and communities.
105. These innovations evidence the shift in the emphasis and approach of the council. It fundamentally changes the leadership role of the councillor by placing them further at the forefront of communities to support and develop

³ <https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/Public%20Health%20Annual%20Report%202019.pdf>

community activity and initiatives which addresses issues and builds resilience. Their role is to also lead and facilitate council and partner activity to tackle issues in their area, such as deprivation. As such the instigation of the ward walks and ward funds has the effect of increasing demands on councillors. This is because it makes the feedback loop from resident to councillor more intensive, and increase the visibility of the councillors on these occasions. As a consequence this makes them more directly answerable to their communities augmenting their level of commitment and involvement.

Support for councillors

106. A number of councillors spend the equivalent of a full-time job in discharging their duties: analysis from the Councillor Journal demonstrates that the median councillor that responded spent 47.5 hours on council business that week. As demonstrated by the survey, councillors take a very hands-on approach to their casework. However, councillors have commented that due to the cuts, there are fewer council services. For example, one councillor commented that a pedestrian crossing took two years to get implemented at the end of last year, however the same issue took them only one year to get implemented in 2015.

107. There are two members of staff within the Councillor Support Office who provide non-political administrative support to councillors. Alongside this, both the Conservative and Labour groupings have a dedicated Political Assistant to assist with support around policy development.

108. As stated in paragraph 81, councillors are expected to be involved with PACT meetings, and a number of other outside bodies in their official capacities, all of which demand time⁴. Furthermore, although the ward walks are meant to assist councillors to execute their role successfully (as stated in paragraphs 96-101), the ward walks and the new ways of working are leading to an intensification of community casework. However, these new approaches also provide a greater support framework, assisting councillors in meeting the intensified casework.

109. Consistent feedback from survey respondents was that most councillors are struggling with the growing workload since the cuts began. Several councillors cited the cutting of local neighbourhood wardens as placing greater burden on councillors who now have to fulfil this role. Part of this burden has been alleviated, as previously stated, by the creation of designated 'Ward Directors'. This is where each Director is assigned a series of wards within the authority. The relevant ward councillors can then approach these directors for assistance concerning matters relating to the wards.

Figure 5 – Proportion of weekly hours according to journal responses

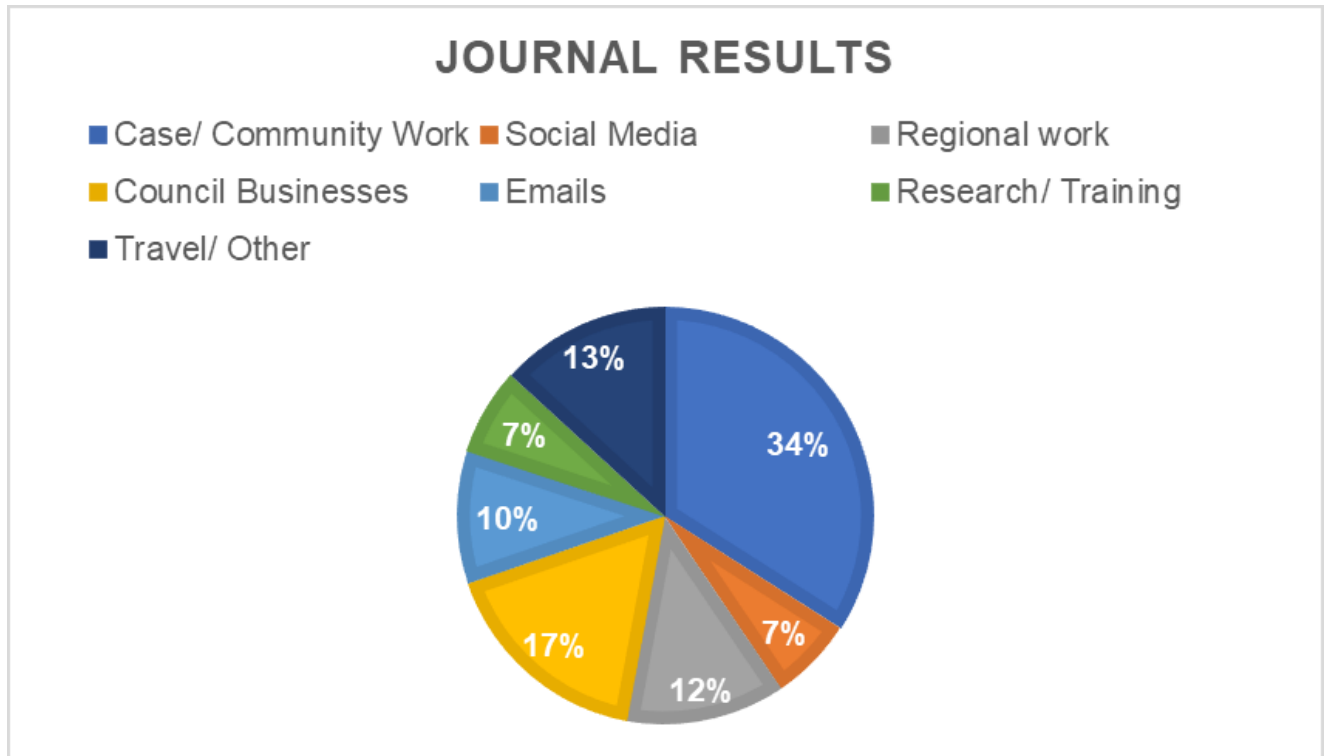


Figure 6 – Total weekly hours spent

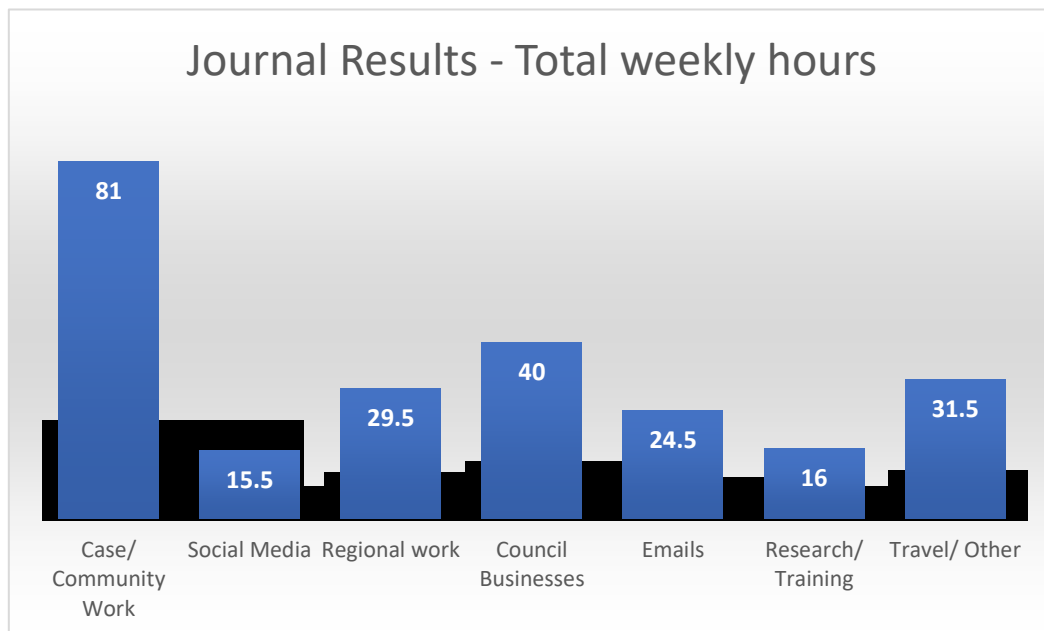


Figure 7 – Median respondents weekly hours

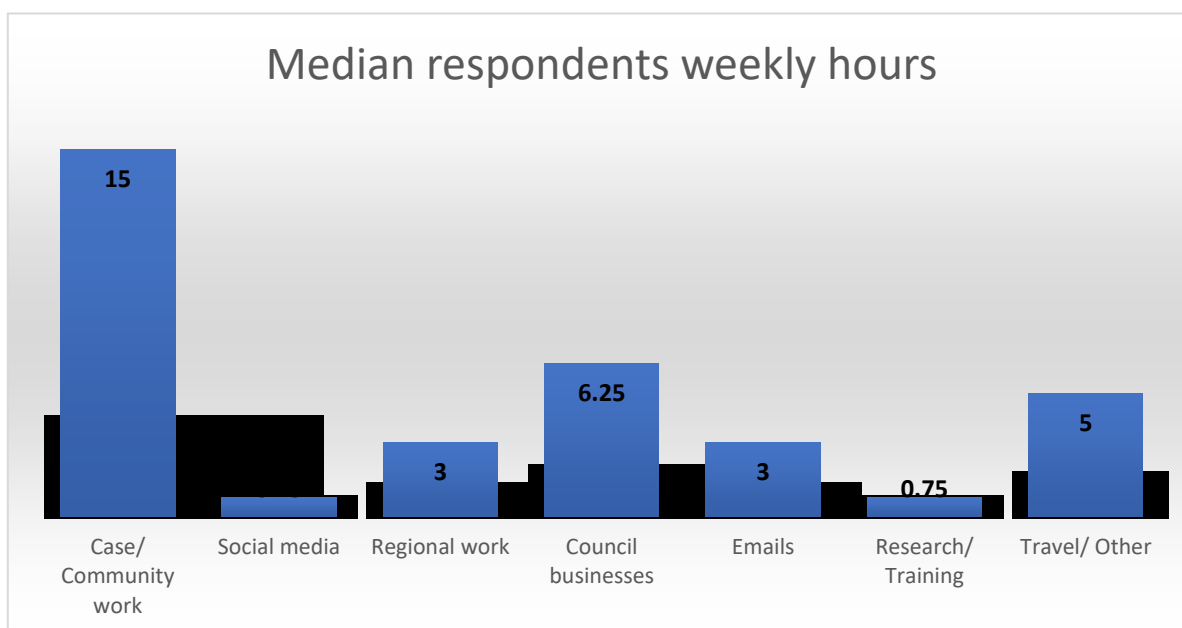


Table 9 – total weekly hours worked by respondents in Member Journal

| Respondents | Total weekly hours |
|---------------|--------------------|
| 1 | 62.5 |
| 2 | 50.5 |
| 3 | 48 |
| 4 | 25 |
| 5 | 3 |
| 6 | 47 |
| Median | 47.5 hours |

Determining the optimal council size: options appraisal

110. There are three options available for the council size: increase it, reduce it, or no change from the present 60-councillor arrangement. The LGBCE state that they “*have no pre-conceived views on the number of councillors necessary to run any particular local authority effectively, and we are content to accept proposals for an increase, a decrease or the retention of the existing number of councillors, but only on the basis that they can be justified.*”⁵ All three options were analysed by the project team in the drafting of this report and are evaluated in turn. Option three is recommended by this report.

Option one: Reducing the number of councillors

⁵ [https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Corporate%20Documents/technical-guidance-2014%20\(reduced\).pdf](https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Corporate%20Documents/technical-guidance-2014%20(reduced).pdf)

111. The project team analysed the argument for reducing the number of councillors to two per ward – which a few councillors called for. At first, there appears to be a strong case for this as the reduction in councillors would generate a revenue saving for the council.
112. If there was a reduction of 20 councillors then this would generate an annual saving of at least £184,687 annually – it is assumed that only non-executive councillors would be reduced as the cabinet and other additional roles that provide additional allowance would need to be maintained.
113. Wolverhampton currently has a smaller councillor: elector ratio than the other three Black Country local authorities. The authority currently has 2,960 electors per councillor whilst the other three authorities average at 3,243 electors per councillor – although Wolverhampton’s ratio will draw closer to its neighbours over the next six years (see paragraph 114). On first glance, this evidence indicates that the council should potentially reduce the number of councillors, however, further evidence will demonstrate why this would have a negative impact.

Option two: increase the council size

114. The opposite approach – to increase the council size – would cost more money than at present. At a time of local government austerity, spending more money on the role of councillors instead of service provision is questionable. Such an increase would be difficult to justify considering cuts and reductions to services affecting local residents – which many survey respondents highlighted.

Option three: maintain the council size

115. The Councillor Survey and Journal revealed several key reasons why a reduction in the council size would have a negative impact on the council. Evidence from these exercises demonstrated that councillors are increasingly overstretched within their roles. 73% of councillors stated that they spend more time on council business with 69% declaring that they spend more time than they originally expected within their councillor role. This is due to cuts in council services along with growing regional and community work. For example, several councillors stated in the survey that many residents now approach councillors with issues that previously were assisted by local neighbourhood wardens – a service that was cut several years ago. In recent years several factors have led to rising casework for councillors (community/casework work taking 15 hours of the median respondent’s week in the Councillor Journal) with councillors also attending community meetings such as PACT, school governors, etc... The instigation of the ‘Ward Walks’ initiative has further intensified councillors role in the community’s (see paragraph 100). One respondents said, *“I fear the increase in workload will make councillors unable to offer the time to their constituents and this will be detrimental if we are to build up our trust in our communities, particularly for*

democracy.” In the survey, when asked what aspect of their duties had changed most in recent years, a word cloud analysis demonstrated that “*more demanding*” was specifically stated by 48% of councillors. Within the journal, the median respondent spent 47.5 hours a week on council business.⁶ Another councillor quoted in the survey, “*There are not enough hours in the day. This is really a full-time job.*” All this data indicates that councillors face a growing workload which is not expected to reduce in the future.

116. Analysis of the survey results demonstrated that there is a broad divide between councillors that are retired or unemployed who have enough time to deal with their duties, and councillors who work full-time and often feel overstretched. 63% of councillors responded that they have enough time to fulfil their duties with 56% stating that they had sufficient time to effectively communicate with ward residents. However, 38% of the councillors that stated they had enough time to fulfil their duties also specifically stated that this was primarily down to the fact that they were not in employment/ retired. For example one said, “*As I am semi-retired this has become more or less a full-time job. If I had a full-time job, I would not have enough time.*” Another stated, “*I only have enough time because I have replaced working hours in gainful employment with hours given to the community and for local democracy.*” Finally, a third councillor mentioned, “*I work full time so do not have enough time (to communicate effectively with residents) as I personally believe being a ward councillor is a full time role.*” There is a clear theme that most employed councillors struggle to balance their councillor work load with their private workload. If the council wants to encourage diverse membership (including those within and outside of employment) then it cannot unintentionally exclude candidates by making it very difficult for councillors in full-time employment to fulfil their duties.

117. It is instructive to examine one particular ward in the city, where a serving councillor has been on a leave of absence since May 2019 as a consequence of ill-health. This ward provides a tangible demonstration of the issues raised by having only two councillors per ward. This is one of the wards with severe pockets of deprivation, and the two remaining councillors (who are expected to pick up their own correspondence and that of the absent councillor) stated in the Councillor Survey that being under-resourced has led to overwork. Indeed, one of the councillors stated he would not have stood for election had he known the amount of extra work expected given his colleague’s absence. This same councillor has indicated he will step down after this first term of office because of the workload.

118. The impact of changes to regional work is further increasing the responsibilities and workload for councillors. As the council is part of the WMCA there is a significant demand for councillors to attend meetings of WMCA to represent Wolverhampton. In total 24 councillors currently attend up to 58 regional bodies across the West Midlands. This regional work puts

⁶ See table 9 and figures 6 and 7 for full details.

greater pressure on councillors. One councillor stated, *“The regional community meetings come with other sub-meetings and ceremonial activities... you must immerse yourself in it. So in the end you find out you’re doing so many hours. And as a young parent who isn’t retired that means I have to give up lots of hours in my other job to do my Council job properly especially as I’m in a marginal ward.”* This quote also exemplifies the additional pressure put on employed councillors. Figure 5, 6 and 7 also exhibits that the median respondent spent 3 hours on regional work that week with regional work taking up 12% of all six journal respondents time (25% if travel included). The prominence of devolution on central government’s agenda means that regional working is only expected to increase.

119. The total population of Wolverhampton has grown 9% since the last boundary review in 2003, 16 years ago, although the elector population has only grown 3.3% in that time. The electoral projections (appendix 2) indicate that the authority can anticipate a rise circa 2.5% in the elector population up to 2026 – seeing $\frac{3}{4}$ of 16 years of elector growth occurring in just six years. This rising population, which has historically increased fastest in deprived areas of the city, means more electors for councillors to respond to, and a commensurate increase in workload. It is relevant that much of the population growth has been in deprived areas, because people living in deprived areas may have multiple challenges (such as benefit entitlements, housing issues, schooling for children) and seek support from the council more readily than people in non-deprived areas. By 2026 the authority’s elector to councillor average is expected to stand at 1:3,034, closer to our Black Country neighbours.

120. In light of the preceding evidence, if a reduction in councillors and/ or ward numbers was adopted as policy and repeated across the authority, it is likely that this would be detrimental to the effectiveness of the local authority. However, rather than increasing the council size, to enable councillors to cope with the growing pressure on councillor time, this option three advocates providing further support for elected councillors and maintaining the council size. As previously mentioned, the role of ‘ward director’ has been instigated where one senior officer covers four wards. Alongside ward councillors, they then examine the key concerns in that locality analysing the spending needs to improve the area – this includes looking at issues such as visible litter, detritus, fly tipping, graffiti and other large concerns of residents. This process aids in distributing a small £10,000 pot per ward on community schemes. These innovations enable officers to provide greater support for councillors to ensure their workload does not become unmanageable. Option three believes the council size should be maintained.

Conclusion

121. In light of the presented evidence – rising demand for services, challenging budget cuts, growing levels of complex casework, electorate growth and the increasing ease (via social media; communications technology) that residents can contact councillors – the council recommends option three to the LGBCE. The council believes that a reduction in the

number of councillors would be detrimental to the residents of Wolverhampton as it would undermine councillors' ability to effectively represent their communities, carry out their executive roles and contribute to the burgeoning regional agenda. The reasoning for this view has been highlighted throughout this submission.

122. Councillors face a rising work load with the median councillor in the Councillor Journal spending 47.5 hours that week on council business. Many reported that this pressure makes it a struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance. This is combined with a rising population, a new place-based approach intensifying councillor's role in the community – the median journal respondent worked 15 hours that week on casework/ community business – and the importance of Wolverhampton making an effective regional contribution as one of the WMCA's constituent councils will inevitably lead to further growing pressure on councillors.
123. The specific example of one ward where a councillor has had a prolonged absence provides a clear example of the potential pressure that could result from a reduced number of councillors. Here one recently elected councillor has instigated that they will step down due to the overwork wrought by their councillor role. 73% of councillors stated that over recent years they have spent more time on their councillor role and 48% of survey respondents specifically mentioned "*more demanding*" when describing changes in their role over recent years. These figures will likely rise if greater pressure is placed on councillors through a reduction in numbers.
124. Conversely, in a strained economic context, where services have had to be cut over a number of years, the council does not believe it could justify an increase in councillor numbers.
125. As part of its place-based focus, the council has implemented several new approaches. Ward directors, to develop a senior officer ownership at a locality level. Ward walks, to work collaboratively with councillors to identify pressing community issues. Ward funds, to enable councillors to respond quickly to particular local needs. The ward walks have led to an intensification of case work appearing for councillors, however, new approach also provides a greater support structure to enable work around the locality to be effectively carried out. Further mechanisms like this will enable the council to remain as one of the most effective local authorities in the country.
126. The LGBCE "aims to recommend a council size that allows the council to take decisions effectively, manage the business and responsibilities of the council successfully, and provide effective community leadership and representation⁷"; in light of the preceding evidence, a reduction in the number of councillors in Wolverhampton would be inconsistent with these principles. Increasing the council size is not feasible in the light of continued public cuts.

⁷ [https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Corporate%20Documents/technical-guidance-2014%20\(reduced\).pdf](https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Corporate%20Documents/technical-guidance-2014%20(reduced).pdf)

The council believes that retaining the council size whilst introducing further methods of support for councillors facing growing pressure in their role, stated in option three, is the optimum way forward. Therefore, this option three is recommended to the LGBCE.