Council Size Submission

Swindon Borough Council

Contents

How to Make a Submission

It is recommended that submissions on future governance arrangements and council size follow the guidance provided and use the format below as a template. Submissions should be treated as an opportunity to focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. **Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them**.

The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

'Good' submissions, i.e. those that are considered to be most robust and persuasive, combine the following *key success components* (as set out in the guidance that accompanies this template):

- Clarity on objectives

- A straightforward and evidence-led style

- An understanding of local place and communities

- An understanding of councillors' roles and responsibilities

About You

The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, a resident group, or an individual.

This submission is made by agreement of the full council.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

Please explain the authority's reasons for requesting this electoral review; it is useful for the Commission to have context. *NB/ If the Commission has identified the authority for review under one if its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*

Click or tap here to enter text.

The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 - 20 years. **The consideration of future governance arrangements and council size should be set in the wider local and national policy context.** The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and

determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

- When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?
- To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?
- Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?
- What influence will local and national policy trends likely have on the Council as an institution?
- What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

The Council currently operates executive style governance arrangements, and has done for a number of years. Prior to adopting the current arrangements, the Council had operated a committee based system of governance since its inception in 1997. The current arrangements include a Cabinet comprising a total of 10 councillors including the Council Leader, and a committee structure tailored to the Council's statutory duties and workloads in specialist areas such as licensing and planning. The Council considers its current governance arrangements are effective and efficient, but remains open to reviewing and adjusting these arrangements whenever it becomes apparent that this could be beneficial, for example, the recent creation of 3 new policy committees to support the Council's desire to bolster this area of work.

The Council has undergone various inspections including Ofsted most recently, and a Local Government Association Peer Review in 2022. The Peer Review in particular noted that the Council was engaged in a huge amount of activity, and that this could result in capacity pressures. The Council is confident that with strong management and clear direction, it is able to respond to any capacity issues raised within current councillor capacity. That said, the Council considers that any reduction to council numbers may jeopardise this.

The primary areas of central government policy that directly impact the Council relate to reductions in funding, and to increased requirements to provide statutory services. Local policy reflects the Council's specific environment and the resources available to it, whereas central government policy does not always achieve this. Within the context of vastly reduced central government funding compared to historic levels, it is conceivable that non-statutory services may at some point need to be reduced. This may cause councillor workloads to increase, but within the limits that are reasonable with 57 councillors.

The council size proposed is 57 elected councillors, which is the same as currently. It is considered that 57 councillors is an appropriate number given the particular attributes of the Swindon area, but it is acknowledged that there are currently some disparities between wards resulting in a higher proportion of constituency work falling to some individual councillors. Retaining 57 councillors, but with amended ward boundaries, would result in a more equitable distribution of constituency work and a more even and manageable workload for all councillors. Any reduction in councillor numbers is likely to have a detrimental effect on councillor effectiveness.

Local Authority Profile

Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting, in particular the local geography, demographics and community characteristics. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description should cover all of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?
- Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
- Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Community characteristics – is there presence of "hidden" or otherwise complex deprivation?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Further to providing a description, the Commission will be looking for a submission that demonstrates an understanding of place and communities by putting forth arguments on council size based upon local evidence and insight. For example, how does local geography, demographics and community characteristics impact on councillor casework, workload and community engagement?

Swindon is a large town in the county of Wiltshire, with a population of approximately 233,407 people and 95,862 households (Census 2021), approximately 75 miles west of London. Swindon has expanded greatly since the last census, with an 11.6% increase in population from 2011 to 2021 and an 8.5% increase in the number of households. It lies on both the Great Western Main Line and the M4 corridor.

The borough of Swindon has approximately 95,862 households and covers the large town of Swindon, the smaller market town of Highworth and a number of villages of which the largest is Wroughton. The Borough covers an approximate area of 230 square km of which approximately 40 square Km (i.e. 17%) are within the town of Swindon. In 2021, the urban population of the borough was approximately 89%, while the rural population was approximately 11%.

The median age of residents in Swindon Borough is 39 years according to the 2021 census. Overall, Swindon has an aging population with those aged 65 and over increasing from 28,854 in 2011 to 37,072 in 2021 (an increase of 28.5%) making up 15.9% of the population. Those aged <16 make up 19.8% of the population in 2021 (11.8% increase); while those aged 16-64 make up 64.3% in 2021 (8% increase). In percentage terms the largest increases in population were seen in those aged 70-74 (46.6% increase) and 55-59 (37.6% increase). Without a large increase in available resources, a higher old age dependency ratio will place further pressure on providing appropriate services and helping residents live healthy and independent lives for longer. The structure and characteristics of the population vary greatly by electoral ward, which emphasises the need for planning targeted to local needs.

81.5% of the population of Swindon were recorded as "White" at the time of the 2021 Census. The 2021 Census shows that the top five ethnic groups in Swindon Borough are:
1.   'White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British' (173,206; 74.2%)
2.   'Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Indian' (17,643; 7.6%)
3.   'White: Polish' (3,694; 1.6%)
4.   'Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Nepali (includes Gurkha)' (2,328; 1%)

5.   'White: European Mixed' (2,297; 0.98%)

The 'Asian/Asian British' population in the Borough is not uniformly distributed and is predominantly concentrated in Central and Eastcott. Other wards located towards the centre of Swindon town also have an elevated proportion of 'Asian/Asian British' residents.

The Indices of Deprivation 2019 show that Swindon ranks 98 out of 151 upper-tier local authorities for average deprivation score, with the upper-tier local authority ranked first being the most deprived relatively. This means Swindon has become relatively more deprived since the 2015 indices where it ranked 108 out of 152. Despite this, Swindon is relatively less deprived than most of the England's upper-tier local authorities. More than 60% of Borough falls into the least deprived deciles.

However, there are pockets of deprivation in Swindon, with 12 of the Borough's 132 areas in the most deprived 10% nationally.

The latest figure (2021/22) shows that there are approximately 7.5k children in relative low income families in Swindon (16.3%), which is proportionally lower than both the England and South West figures (19.9% and 17.0%, respectively). The proportion of children in relative low income families has been increasing over the past few years.

The 2021 Census data shows that the most common highest qualification achieved by Swindon residents is Level 4 or above (27.9%; 52,220). However, this is a lower proportion than the figure nationally and regionally (33.9% and 33.1%, respectively). The proportion of the population with level 1, level 2, level 3 and level 4+ qualifications generally lag behind the South West and England averages.

In terms of academic attainment, Swindon is typically at or just below the England average.

The 2022 JSNA notes that Females in Swindon have a life expectancy of 83.6 years and males 79.8 years. There are some marked differences between wards: females are likely to live 8 years longer in St Andrews than in Priory Vale, and males 5 years longer in Chiseldon and Lawn compared to Central ward, demonstrating health inequalities present in the borough.

Electorate forecasts produced for the review have made use of the methodology set out by the LGBCE in their guidance for the Polling District Forecasting Tool. However, they have also incorporated local intelligence about housing completions and future forecast housing growth.

The current number of electors in 2023 is 167,054. This is forecast to increase to 177,732 by 2029, representing an expected total increase of approximately 6.39%. This increase is down to two key elements, population increase by natural change and net migration.

The Council believes that a council size of 57 permits both adequate representation for the borough's communities and balances the workload generated from attending to the levels of casework (please see casework section below for more details). A council size of 57 works well for the specific geographic divisions, notably for the urban core, the busy A419 running north-south towards the east of the borough, and the villages to the south of the borough. Additionally 57 councillors provides representation from across the borough's ethnic and cultural groups.

Council Size

The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships), and Community Leadership**. Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

Strategic Leadership

Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		
Governance Model	*Key lines of explanation*	➤ *What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?* ➤ *The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?* ➤ *If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.* ➤ *By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?* ➤ *Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.*
	Analysis	The Council has adopted the Leader and Cabinet form of governance. The Cabinet is made up of the Leader and up to nine other Cabinet Members. These may include a Deputy Leader who is chosen and appointed by the Leader. The Council has decided that certain non-executive functions which are not reserved to the Council as a whole will be the responsibility of the Committees listed below, and to officers as described later in this submission. The Council considers its committee structure to be appropriate for the type and scale of the Authority, and in keeping with other similar local authorities. The committees set out above are considered critical to the efficient organisation of Council business. Some advisory

		and operational matters may also be carried out by panels, boards, Cabinet Member Advisory Groups, working groups or other forums.

It should be noted that the Council's committee structure was designed to address the anticipated workloads of 57 Members.

Part 5(4) of the Council's Constitution sets out the general responsibilities associated with the role of councillor, and details of additional responsibilities and tasks expected of Cabinet Members.

In terms of policy development, three specialist policy development committees have been established as part of the Council's overarching scrutiny arrangements. These committees are aligned with the Council's Missions and focus specifically on policy creation, development and revision. The Committees are able to establish sub-committees, working groups, task and finish groups and other similar arrangements to assist in the discharge of functions. Detailed work is predominately undertaken by these groups, with the specific format of the group selected to best suit the task at hand.

This approach allows dedicated time and consideration to be given to new policy initiatives, reviews and periodic revision. Members of each committee will develop specialist skills in the area of policy with which they are primarily involved, leading to a greater grasp of the context and typical considerations associated with a particular matter.

To maximise the effectiveness of this structure, both Cabinet and Cabinet Members will adopt an active role in the policy development process. At the beginning of each municipal year, Cabinet will meet to agree its broad policy direction for the coming year. This process would include consideration of input provided by Chairs of the Policy Development Committees, Overview and Scrutiny, opposition and backbench councillors, parish and town councils, and any other relevant stakeholders. Once a policy direction has been established and prioritised, Cabinet will designate responsibility for specific policy initiatives to the relevant Cabinet Member who will sponsor the development work, and will bring the final draft policy back to Cabinet in due course for consideration.

Cabinet Members as sponsors of policy initiatives will |

liaise with the appropriate Policy Development Committee, setting out the intended aims and objectives. The Cabinet Member sponsor will be available to the Policy Development Committee to provide input where required, and to advise on any change to priorities by Cabinet. Once the policy is in a final stage, the Cabinet Member evaluates the output and presents the policy for consideration by Cabinet, and ultimately full Council as necessary.

Cabinet Members will also become the first point of Member contact in relation to service performance reports and general updates on service matters that fall within their portfolios. The Cabinet Member would then escalate matters to Cabinet as deemed appropriate. This process does not affect the ability of Cabinet or Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake scrutiny of performance. The intention is to help ensure that Cabinet and Committees are not inundated with matters that more appropriately should be directed to the portfolio holder in the first instance. This approach also enables cross reference between ongoing matters and concerns raised with the Cabinet Member by members of the public.

In addition, policy and strategy are determined independently by Cabinet and Council as appropriate. Overview and Scrutiny Committee is also involved in the policy development process as all Cabinet decisions go to this committee for review by default.

In providing a general picture of the nature of the Council's governance arrangements, the table below provides a high level illustration of the level of commitment undertaken by Members arising from the current annual meeting schedule for formal non-regulatory committee meetings

Formal Committee Meetings	Time commitment (avg per meeting, preparation and attendance)
Full Council	5 hours
Cabinet	10.9 hours
Standards Committee	3.4 hours
Overview and Scrutiny	4.5
Policy Development (Net Zero)*	2.9
Policy Development (Inequality)*	3.3
Policy Development (Better Swindon)*	4.2
Health & Wellbeing Board	2.2
Chief Officer Appointments	3.2
Audit Committee	5.7
Special Committee	1.5

		Appeals Committee	2.7

*these are new committees, with a high proportion of work undertaken outside formal meetings

In addition to Members' attendance at meetings, as set out above, Members will also on occasion need to take a place on a committee for which they are a substitute/deputy. Depending on the frequency of substitution, this could impact on the level of commitment required of those Members.

It should also be noted that many Members will also wish to keep abreast of Council business conducted in Committees that they are not a member of. In such cases, Members will spend additional time reviewing the agendas and minutes of these meetings where the content is relevant to them and their constituencies.

There are a number of additional groups and other formal commitments attended by Members. These are set out in more detail later in this submission.

Portfolios	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *How many portfolios will there be?* ➢ *What will the role of a portfolio holder be?* ➢ *Will this be a full-time position?* ➢ *Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?*
	Analysis	The Council has the maximum number of Executive Members permissible (10) and each of these Members is assigned a specific portfolio. The portfolios themselves focus on the key challenges and opportunities faced by the Council. Portfolio holder's responsibilities necessitate attendance at a greater number of committee meetings. The role of Cabinet Member also necessitates undertaking work in partnership with other local authorities and external organisations. The particular functions to be delegated to individual members of the Cabinet by the Leader, within those specific portfolios, are set out below:

Portfolio	Responsibilities
1. Leader of the Council	• Overview of Policy • Local, regional, and national relations • Emergency planning • Delivering council missions • Relationship with businesses • Communications Chair of Health and Wellbeing

				• Board
				• SBC member representative on the Integrated Care Partnership
		2.	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Organisational Oversight	• Ensuring community access to council services • External Contract monitoring • Enabling services including Performance and Data, IT and Digital, HR and OD, Legal, Customer Services
		3.	Cabinet Member for Finance	• Value for money • Revenue and benefits service • Financial management, revenue and capital programmes • Property and asset management • Town centre • Local plan • Planning • Licensing
		4.	Cabinet Member for Adult's Social Care	• Adult's social services • Services to adult people with disabilities • Community adult mental health services • Reducing domestic violence • Relationship with Integrated Care Board
		5.	Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care	• Children's social services • Fostering and adoption services • Children's mental health • Children's health • Children and family services
		6.	Cabinet Member for Housing	• Homeline • Sheltered accommodation • Council housing • Swindon Housing Company • Homelessness • Empty homes • Right to buy • Private sector housing renovation grant • Estate and tenancy services • Private rented sector • Housing Repairs • Gypsies & Travelling Community • Green Housing
		7.	Cabinet Member for the Environment and Transport	• Recycling • Domestic and trade refuse • Waste disposal and treatment • Community forest • Countryside and landscaping • Country parks • Fly-tipping • Cemeteries and crematoria • Public transport

				• Parking
				• Highway and maintenance work
				• Street lighting
				• Abandoned vehicles
				• Local transport plan
				• Traffic and transport planning
			8. Cabinet Member for Heritage, Art and Culture	• Libraries • Museums • Music venues • Art galleries • Special events • Improving Swindon's cultural offerings • Heritage • Heritage Buildings and the Heritage Action Zone
			9. Cabinet Member for Education	• Lifelong learning skills • Early Years development • Education and schools • Youth offending team • Home to school transport • Services for Children with Disabilities • Knife crime
			10. Cabinet Member for Communities and Joint Working	• Parish Councils • Public Health • Public Protection • Trading Standards • Leisure centres • Sports development • Nightlife • Volunteering • Police relations • Communities & Community Engagement • Community safety partnership • CCTV management • Citizen assemblies • Community buildings

Given the level of responsibility, it is expected that the role of Cabinet Member is likely to be a full-time one. Members who are not Cabinet Members may have more flexibility in terms of assuming additional responsibilities, and therefore their role can also add up to a significant time commitment during an average week. Time commitment could be looked at as a sliding scale with more time being committed by Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs, and members of committees which meet more frequently .

The Council strives to attract elected Members that truly represent the areas' entire population, and it is desirable that the Council attracts people who are engaged in full or part-time work as well as being a Councillor.

		In terms of decision making, the Council has decided that other than certain functions reserved to Council, all other functions including local choice functions, are to be executive functions. Responsibility for these functions rests with the Leader of the Council who will decide which of these functions s/he wishes to perform personally and which are to be delegated to Cabinet, a Cabinet Committee, individual Cabinet Members, or to officers. Article 7 of the Council's Constitution offers further explanation on the operation of the Executive.
Delegated Responsibilities	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?* ➢ *How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?*
	Analysis	There is a scheme of delegation to senior officers set out in the Constitution at Part 8 which permits officers to take delegated decisions, many of which are in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member. Supplementary schemes of delegations are in place in relation to key individual service areas, further delegating certain responsibilities to appropriate officers in the Authority. Cabinet will take key and strategic decisions. Cabinet Members will take non-key decisions that fall under their portfolio responsibilities (and that are not already delegated to an officer). The Mayor is not involved in decision-making. The mechanics of the decision making process employed by the Council are set out in the Council's Constitution at Article 13.

Accountability

Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.

Key lines of explanation	

Analysis	The principal means of accountability within the authority is delivered through the Council's overview and scrutiny process. Prior to May 2023, five Overview and Scrutiny Committees and one overarching Scrutiny Committee were in operation, covering the following areas of responsibility:
	   • Adults Health, Care and Housing
	   • Childrens Health, Social Care and Education
	   • Communities and Place
	   • Growing the Economy
	   • Resources and Corporate
	   • Scrutiny Committee
	
	In 2022, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) conducted a Scrutiny Improvement Review for Swindon Borough Council. CfGS identified opportunities to consolidate and coordinate meetings more efficiently to enable Scrutiny to focus on a smaller set of priorities. CfGS suggested that consolidation would help identify the core purpose and activities for scrutiny. This required re-alignment of the existing committee structure pursuant to the need to enhance efficiency, economy and effectiveness.
	
	CfGS guidance encourages greater use of member briefings on matters of local interest and priority, away from formal committees. This is a viable and more efficient alternative to formal overview and scrutiny committee meetings. Formal meetings could focus on key issues and the detailed scrutiny of council proposals, both before and after decisions are made, thereby adding significant value to the process. Routine service related updates and performance data can in the first instance be approached in this way, with specific matters of interest or concern identified therein examined in further detail as necessary.
	
	The Council has disbanded the 5 former Overview and Scrutiny Committees and 1 Scrutiny Committee and created a new primary Overview and Scrutiny Committee with policy development being undertaken primarily by the new policy development committees. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has adopted a strategic role, and is able to establish

		sub-committees, working groups, task and finish groups and other similar arrangements to assist in the discharge of its functions. Detailed policy development work is also predominately undertaken by these groups, with the specific format of the group selected to best suit the task at hand. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will meet approximately 10 times a year, and has 10 councillors on its membership. This approach allows for a single strategic approach to overview and scrutiny, with all relevant matters being co-ordinated and overseen by the same committee. This also enables work scheduling and prioritisation to be more streamlined, with the committee having contextual information regarding all matters currently within or being directed to the process. The aim is to reduce duplication between several committees where each committee has an overlapping interest in a particular matter. There should be an associated saving to Member and officer time and resource with fewer reports and meetings being necessary which enables the Council to focus more clearly on policy development under the new Policy Development Committee arrangements Any resulting reduction of meetings is not intended to degrade the ability of committees to conduct effective and targeted scrutiny as the Committee will be able to draw assistance for specific tasks from sub-committees, working groups, task and finish groups and other similar arrangements as needed. This 'as required' approach will mean additional resource would only be required in response to a specific task rather than to support regular committees. This also ensures that the Committee will be able to be entirely flexible in its approach to its work. The Council also has a call-in process that allows elected Members to request the call-in of executive decisions that have been taken. All Cabinet decisions are automatically referred to the Council's main scrutiny committee by default. Whilst the above scrutiny arrangements provide the opportunity for elected Members to hold the Cabinet to account, they also provide a forum for residents to seek answers to questions from Cabinet Members and in some cases external organisations, and to challenge proposals.
Statutory Function		This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?
Planning	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?* ➢ *Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?*

	Analysis	Typically, officer delegation accounts for between 95- 98% of applications, with Committee deciding 2-5%. There is no correlation between the complexity of applications and those which go to Committee, though typically any significant 'major' development would be considered by Committee. This figure has remained fairly static over the last few years and reflects the Scheme of Delegation, including 'call in' rights. The Council holds monthly Planning Committees (usually excepting May). The Borough has one Committee covering the Council area. Committees rarely extend beyond 4 or 5 items and there is no suggestion that Area based meetings would add any additional value. Cabinet Members do not sit on Planning Committee but may attend to speak on planning issues rising that are relevant to their portfolio. Meetings usually last between 2-3 hours with a similar amount of preparation expected in terms of reading the reports and potentially visiting sites. Non-Committee members may also attend Committee meetings to comment on applications that impact on their Ward.
	Key lines of explanation	
Licensing	Analysis	The Council holds a minimum of 4 Licensing Committee meetings a year. Occasionally these are cancelled if there is no businesses to consider and on rare occasions an ad-hoc licensing committee will be convened in the event of urgent business arising. The council also has 2 sub committees: • Licensing Panels – these primarily deal with licensing hearings • Licensing Sub Committee – for taxi and private hire licensing matters The number of licensing panels varies each year: <table><tr><td>Year</td><td>Number of Panel Meetings</td></tr><tr><td>2018/19</td><td>9</td></tr><tr><td>2019/20</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>2020/21</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>2021/22</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>2022/23</td><td>7</td></tr><tr><td>2023 (current)</td><td>5</td></tr></table>

		Licensing panel meetings will often last between 2 to 3 hours. Licensing Committee can be up to 2 hours. Licensing Sub-Committee has not met since 2018 but these will be in place for 2023. It is estimated there will be up to 6 per year, and meetings are likely to last 2 hours. A similar amount of preparation time may be needed for each meeting. Any new member on licensing committee that sits on a panel must have undertaken training and be experienced or undertaking shadowing. The panel chair will always be an experienced licensing committee member (often the chair) who has experienced panel meetings (Hearings) before.
Other Regulatory Bodies	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *What will they be, and how many members will they require?* ➢ *Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.*
	Analysis	See details elsewhere within this submission.
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
Key lines of explanation		➢ *Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?* ➢ *How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?* ➢ *What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?*
	Analysis	There are a number of outside bodies, wholly owned companies and other groups routinely attended by councillors in a formal capacity. The nature of these bodies vary, but a reasonable estimation of time commitment for each meeting would be 2-5 hours. By way of example, some of these external partnerships include - • England's Economic Heartland. Quarterly Board meetings attended by the Leader of the Council, again with voting rights. Towns Advisory and Engagement Board. Quarterly Board to discuss Towns Fund projects. Cabinet Member attends along with a local Ward Member and opposition Member. This meeting has no formal decision making powers. • Heritage Board. Quarterly Discussion forum with no formal

		decision making powers. Attended by an Cabinet Member.
		• The Council has re-joined Fast Growth Cities and is also an invitee to the Western Gateway. These organisations hold quarterly Board meetings are attended by the Leader of the Council.
		• Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Authority
		• Wiltshire Pension Fund Committee
		• Wiltshire and Swindon Police and Crime Panel
		• Local Safeguarding Board x2
		• Borough/Parish Consultation Meeting (Cabinet Member)
		• Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership. Quarterly Board meetings attended by the Leader of the Council who has voting rights. These will cease in 2024.
		A full list can be found attached to this submission.

Community Leadership

The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties? The Commission also wants to see a consideration of **how the use of technology and social media by the council as a whole, and by councillors individually, will affect casework, community engagement and local democratic representation. Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?* ➢ *Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?* ➢ *How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?* ➢ *Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?* ➢ *Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?* ➢ *Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be*

	Analysis	A questionnaire was used to gain further insight into the community leadership and casework elements of a councillors role. The questionnaire was sent to all councillors, and achieved a response rate of 24 Members (42% of the current membership). A summary of the results has informed the Council's response to this section.

The Members who responded identified a high percentage of interaction with their constituents taking place via electronic means, although this varied according to the demographics of the residents within the ward. Members described more elderly sections of the community preferring face to face or telephone contact, whilst younger sections of the community communicated almost exclusively via electronic means.

In terms of holding councillor surgeries, the Council does not have any formal structure for such meetings, and whether and how surgeries are conducted is at the discretion of individual councillors. Whilst some councillors arrange surgeries, the general trend appears to be away from physical forums at prescribed times, and for constituents to approach councillors at any time via electronic means. Some councillors convene larger scale public meetings with constituents as a means to improve engagement.

Other forms of interaction used by councillors included leaflets and letter drops within the ward, contributions to local magazines, 'street walks' checking for issues at a street scene level, knocking on doors seeking views from local residents, attending local and community events and forums, and visiting, schools, churches, businesses and youth clubs.

There is an expectation both from this council and the parish/town councils themselves that borough councillors attend parish council meetings in order to provide the link between parish and unitary affairs and remain at the heart of local affairs. The borough contains 1 town council, 18 parish councils and 1 parish meeting. Added to this are the numerous community groups and residents associations that form the more localised focus for civic life and are critical in highlighting and resolving issues that borough members can assist with.

Accordingly, a high proportion of Swindon councillors (who are not also parish/town councillors) attend parish/town council meetings or resident association meetings on a regular basis. Councillors report attending to answer questions, provide updates and collate issues for escalation to the upper tier authority. Some councillors attend a designated ward member |

		meeting slot, whereas others attend as observers.
		On average, Councillors spent 2-4 hours per work on Town/Parish Council related issues, and some significantly more as they attended multiple Parish Councils and/or resident associations.
		In terms engaging with traditionally harder to reach groups, councillors surveyed referred to writing to or visiting all new voters to the electoral role, speaking at or visiting schools, and attending events organised by various minority and faith groups.
Casework	*Key lines of explanation*	➤ *How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?* ➤ *What support do members receive?* ➤ *How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?* ➤ *In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?*
	Analysis	Councillors surveyed were asked to summarise time spent on weekly contact, casework, and general representation in the community. There was a lot of variation in the responses, depending on whether Members were Cabinet members, involved in multiple parish councils and even the type of Ward they represented.
		In terms of time spent on casework, responses varied greatly, with some councillors spending under 10 hours a week on casework whilst others detailed over 20 hours.
		Councillors surveyed consistently highlighted the growing importance of social media and email, making it convenient for constituents to contact them at any time. While this is seen as largely positive, there is also an apparent expectation of instantaneous responses to such enquires due to the convenience of the forum. Social media in particular has assisted councillors in reaching younger groups who perhaps would otherwise not engage. Councillors found social media to be a convenient platform to share news and updates with the community and to seek their views on important matters.
		Councillors identified notable variations between wards and within wards in terms of the level of casework and the nature of that casework. Wards with higher levels of deprivation, although sometimes less engaged, generated more enquiries regarding housing benefits, fly-tipping, anti-social behaviour and parking, while wards with less deprivation more commonly

raised issues of planning, traffic and speeding. A contrast was also observed between more established communities, and those who resided in newer housing estates which had experienced high rates of growth and were sometimes less engaged. Councillors mentioned having to adapt their approach and priorities according to the part of the ward involved, and perhaps duplicating their engagement to different sections of the same ward. Some physical impediments were cited, including geographically large wards or those with challenging topography, for example, making bin collections difficult.

In terms of facilities available to councillors to assist with casework, there is no mandatory scheme for responding to casework neither is there guidance provided to Members, it is a matter of individual preference how Members undertake their casework. The Council utilises a *Members Hotline* online system for logging and tracking casework. The system has been in place for many years and provides an easy to use system for both councillors and officers, designed to utilise modern technology to manage the casework of the 57 councillors.

This allows councillors, when contacted directly by residents, to raise requests for service or log formal complaints on behalf of their residents with the relevant Officer(s), and remain fully informed as to the status tracking of the issue and the response from the Officer(s).In the 12 month period ending August 2023, some 5,210 *Members Hotline* cases were raised, an average of 91 cases per councillor per year. This system provides both a time limit in which Officers must respond and the ability for councillors to escalate the issue to managers if they believe the issue has not been resolved for the resident.

Outside of the *Members Hotline* system, there is a formal complaints policy and residents can log their complaints directly with services. Full details of this policy can be found on the Council website.

Many councillors responding to the survey said they were 'hands on' in terms of their casework, but that this depended on the matter in question. Officer input was more often sought on matters that required additional information or technical input. The sheer quantity of casework and other time pressures also influenced the route chosen to deal with an enquiry.

In summary, the role of the elected Member varies greatly, as does the level of involvement and time committed to the role.

Summary

In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the governance arrangements and number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future.

Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

The Council values the opportunity to make a submission in relation to councillor numbers to inform the Commissions review. The Council has operated with the current number of councillors for several years, and whilst there is an element of electoral growth anticipated, the Council believes that the current balance of councillors is correct. It is acknowledged that some minor adjustment of ward boundaries would be necessary to ensure equity across all wards, but that such adjustments would result in manageable workloads for individual councillors. The Council is awake to any possible capacity pressures, and is confident that any increases can be successfully mitigated with comprehensive officer and technological support.