From:	████████████████████████████████
Sent:	28 June 2022 14:47
To:	reviews
Subject:	West Northamptonshire Councillor Numbers
Attachments:	████████ Council Size submission - West Northamptonshire Boundary Review.pdf
Categories:	Submissions, Nicole

Good afternoon,

Please see my submission on council size attached. It is quite brief as I am an individual it would not make great sense to do a very large submission. However, the submission is backed up by data from West Northamptonshire Council and the most recent Electoral data available on your website (though is was last updated on 11th February 2021 – I did ask for more recent data but told this is not available).

Kind regards,

████████████████████████████
████████████████

Council Size Submission

West Northamptonshire Council

Contents

About You

I am a local resident in the council area ███████████████████████████████████.

The Context for your proposal

This boundary review should have taken place before West Northamptonshire Council was created. The current boundaries make the voice of residents unequal and many boundaries don't seem to follow the basic idea of natural boundaries and cohesive communities. The councillor numbers were just the most convenient at the time and do not seem to be based on any real evidence.

Our proposal will look at relevant evidence of unitary councils which are similarly sized and a similar geography. I will also look at the number of members needed to be able to support residents of the council and to fulfil the functions of the cabinet and various committees of the council.

Local Authority Profile

West Northamptonshire is made up of Northampton Town, which is the largest population centre making up around 45% of the population. The rest of the council area consists of three small towns, Brackley, Daventry and Towcester, and many villages and smaller settlements.

Currently wards consist of around 10,000 electors, in the towns these wards can be manageable, but the rural areas can be covering many square miles and in many cases cover ten or more parishes. These large rural wards are very difficult for councillors to represent effectively.

Council Size

Strategic Leadership

Topic		
Governance Model	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ The council is currently run on an executive model. Though this is not our preferred model I do not believe the council will change in the near future. ➢ Currently there are ten council members which I do not envisage changing.
	Analysis	
Portfolios	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ There are currently ten members of the cabinet ➢ What will the role of a portfolio holder be? ➢ A cabinet member is a full-time position and renumerated accordingly. ➢ Most decisions are taken by the cabinet.
	Analysis	
Delegated Responsibilities	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ Only minor decisions are delegated to officers. ➢ The cabinet is responsible for making decisions, most are ratified by full council.
	Analysis	

Accountability

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		➤ *There is currently an overview scrutiny group and three sub-groups.* ➤ *I believe it would be better to have a scrutiny group to cover each cabinet member.* ➤ *Meetings for each scrutiny are held every two to three months.* ➤ *Currently there are between 17 and 15 members in each committee, but I believe each committee would be effective with ten members*
Analysis		
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*	➤ *There are normally around ten applications per month decided by the area planning committees.* ➤ *This is fewer than in previous years as more applications are delegated to officers and the criteria to call in an application is more strict.* ➤ *There are three area planning committees, one for each of the former Borough and District councils.* ➤ *Only non-executive members serve on the committees.* ➤ *There is one meeting per month and the volume of planning applications referred per month is around three for each area committee.*
	Analysis	
Licensing	*Key lines of explanation*	➤ *The licencing panels will hear around 30 applications per year.* ➤ *And what will be the time commitment for members?* ➤ *The is a licencing committee and a sub-committee which can consist of any three members from the main committee.*
	Analysis	
Other Regulatory Bodies	*Key lines of explanation*	➤ *Audit and Governance Committee* ➤ *Democracy and Standards Committee* ➤ *Pensions Committee* ➤ *Investment Sub-Committee* ➤ *Senior Appointments Committee.*
	Analysis	

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	➢ Disabled People's Forum ➢ Diverse Communities Forum ➢ LGBTQ People and Allies Forum ➢ Pensioners Forum ➢ Women's Forum ➢ Youth Forum	
Analysis		

Appendix 1 shows the number of members in each current committee and how many committees, on average, a member will serve on.

Community Leadership

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	Key lines of explanation	➢ The council does not currently have area committees. ➢ Each councillor interacts differently with their constituents. Some have very little interaction with them but others interact through social media, email, on the door step and through surgeries. ➢ There are currently several forums to help the council to interact with under-represented groups. ➢ Councillors are expected to attend town/parish meetings are regularly as possible or at a minimum provide regular reports.
	Analysis	
Casework	Key lines of explanation	➢ Each member takes their own approach to casework. Some get some feedback from officers and deal with it personally, others just forward it on for members to deal with. ➢ Members are only allowed to interact to officers with case work by sending an email to a generic email address. ➢ Technology has helped some members to interact with constituents through email, social media etc. but others prefer to stick to an analogue approach.
	Analysis	

Similar Unitary Councils

I have identified the ten unitary councils most similar to West Northamptonshire in terms of both size and geography. Of these councils it would suggest the smallest number of members West Northamptonshire should have is 76 and the highest number 108. If I chose the mean number of councillors, comparative to the number of electors, West Northamptonshire should have 85 members. The detail of these councils can be found in appendix 2.

Summary

Given all of the detail in our submission I believe that for residents to be effectively represented and for the council to be effective in carrying out its function the optimum number of members should be 85. With the current arrangements of the council this would mean on average each non-executive councillor will serve on two committees. Even with projected growth each councillor will be representing less than 4,000 electors and the council will be able to function effectively with its current set up.

Appendix 1

Role	Council Members	Cabinet	Planning Policy Committee	Children's Trust Joint Committee	W&LN Shared Services Joint Committee	Police, Fire and Crime Panel	PATROL Adjudication Joint Committee	Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Group	Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee	People Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Audit and Governance Committee	Democracy and Standards Committee	Democracy and Standards Hearing Sub-Committee	Investment Sub-Committee	Pensions Committee	Senior Appointments Committee	Strategic Planning Committee	Local Area Planning Committees	Licensing Committee	Licensing Sub-Committee	Local Pension Board	Health and Wellbeing Board	Schools Forum	TOTAL
Meeting frequency	3-Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	3-Monthly	Adhoc	3-Monthly	Monthly	-Monthly	Monthly	3-Monthly	3-Monthly	Adhoc	-Monthly	2-Monthly	Adhoc	3-Monthly	Monthly	Adhoc	8-monthly	3-Monthly	3-Monthly	3-Monthly	

Authority Name	Electors	No. Wards or Divisions	Council Size	Electors per Councillor
North Somerset	166,916	35	50	3,338
Medway	201,305	22	55	3,660
Central Bedfordshire	215,897	31	59	3,659
South Gloucestershire	221,172	28	61	3,626
Shropshire	246,087	63	74	3,326
Northumberland	248,992	66	67	3,716
East Riding of Yorkshire	268,715	26	67	4,011
Cheshire West and Chester	272,927	45	70	3,899
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	300,664	33	76	3,956
Dorset Council	301,522	52	82	3,677
Cheshire East	307,679	52	82	3,752
Wiltshire	377,981	98	98	3,857
County Durham	391,730	63	126	3,109
Buckinghamshire Council	413,573	49	98	4,220
Cornwall	434,524	122	123	3,533
Average	**291,312**	**52**	**79**	**3,689**
WN Current	297,716	31	93	3,256
WN Average	297,716	53	81	3,676
Max	297,716		71	4,220
Min	297,716		96	3,109