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Cc: reviews; Cllr Suresh Patel; Catherine Whitehead; Mark West; Paul Hanson
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Morning Yemi

Please find attached our final submission for Council Size.

I hope everything is in order, however if you need any clarifications etc, please let me know.

Best wishes
Jane

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**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

The
**Local Government
Boundary Commission**
for England

West Northamptonshire Council Council Size Submission

West Northamptonshire
Council Area



Contents

Foreword	2
About the Council	3
Reasons for Review	3
The Context for the Proposal	3
Local Authority Profile	7
Council Size	14
Strategic Leadership	15
Accountability	22
Community Leadership	29
Summary and Conclusion	32

Foreword

We are very pleased to be offered this opportunity to advise the Local Government Boundary Commission for England of our assessment of the right number of councillors we need to effectively represent communities, deliver council business and provide efficient governance.



Our current electoral arrangements were imposed by the Structural Changes Order which initially created our council in April last year, and while they have served us well, we very much welcome this process and the chance it provides to make further positive change.

Members have worked together across the political parties to prepare our draft submission, which looks at all aspects of this review and its potential impact on our council and our communities. Working together, we have examined a range of factors, including things like the need for effective governance requirements, robust scrutiny and effective community leadership.

As part of the process we have fed in the views of both members and also residents who recently took part in our Big Conversation consultation event. This allowed our residents to express their ideas on the council's role, responsibilities and its structure which may also lead to further changes in the way local councillors are supported to engage with their communities.

West Northants is a great place to live, with wonderful countryside, heritage, leisure opportunities, and many strong established businesses.

Our Commitment is to work with the residents of West Northants and our partners to protect our environment, meet residents' needs for homes and jobs, and ensure that everyone can live well and safely together.

Above all, West Northamptonshire must be a place where everyone thrives, and we very much recognise the importance of good governance in achieving those aims.

Councillor Suresh Patel, Chair of the West Northamptonshire Council's Democracy Standards Committee and the Local Boundary Review Working Group

About The Council

This submission is made on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council. The Council has appointed a working group of members representing all political groups on the Council, which is drawn from the Democracy and Standards Committee to prepare this submission. The group has consulted with the groups through the representatives on the working group and has provided examples from different groups about the way that members work in the different areas of the Council. The recommendation was reached by broad consensus across the representatives on the group and represents a collective view.

Reason for Review

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

The current council size and boundary pattern were dictated by the Northamptonshire Structural Changes Order 2020 and reflected the division boundaries of the former County Council for the West Northamptonshire area. Analysis of the electoral variances for this area also shows that there are more than three wards which are greater than 10% and some greater than 20% and by 2028 one with a variance greater than 60% therefore the Council welcomes the review.

The Context for the proposal

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

West Northamptonshire Council is a new unitary council arising from Local Government Reorganisation. The Shadow Council established the governance arrangements for the new Council which were operational from May 2021 after the election to the new Council. There has been a lot for the Council to do in its first year of operation. The Council has focused on delivering services to residents over reviewing its own governance in its first year. A constitutional review was carried in the first six months but limited changes to governance structures have been made.

There is a review of Scrutiny arrangements underway which is being led by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny which is focused on effective Scrutiny, this may bring governance changes, but the outcome is not known at the time of writing.

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

There is also an agreement to carry out a review of the overall governance. The Council was required to start out as a Cabinet and Leader model, but councillors agreed that this would be reviewed once the Council was established. It has not been possible to carry out this review before the Boundary Review.

In summary, West Northamptonshire Council is in its early stages and there may be governance reviews which bring about changes in the future, but at the current time, the arrangements that we have in place are those that have been established and have been operational since its inception and there are no immediate plans to change those arrangements.

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

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

Shared Services – LGR led to the division of the former County Council into two Councils. The complexity of services (combined with the pandemic) made it difficult to carry out the disaggregation in the time available and therefore a number of services continued to operate across the whole county area as a joint service. In order to manage the joint service, the Council established a Joint Shared Services Committee between NNC and WNC. This is an Executive Committee and meets regularly (usually monthly) to monitor performance of the joint service and to make decisions about proposed changes to service arrangements, amendments to the Inter Authority Agreement which governs the joint arrangements and also to oversee further disaggregation work.

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

Pensions Committee – following LGR the administration of the Northamptonshire Pensions Fund was transferred to West Northamptonshire Council. The Council has a Pensions Committee primarily made up from WNC Councillors with representatives from the NNC. This is a non-executive Committee.

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

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

The council has not been subject to any inspections which have raised issues in relation to capacity or governance since April 2021. The ongoing involvement of the Ofsted in Children's Services led to the creation of the Children's Trust.

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

The effects of transition on the council continues to be felt across all services and impacts on both officers and members. The council has an extensive programme of transformation underway which will; enable the council to bring services from former councils together to operate as a single service, to disaggregate services which are currently shared with NNC, to enable staff to be treated as a single workforce with a set of terms and conditions, to enable all parts of the organisation to communicate effectively together on a single IT system, to have clarity in all budget lines, income and efficiency targets, to have an estate which is serving the needs of single council and local members and staff with aligned culture and values. This work is underway but continues to take up resource and impact on focus.

The wider context is one in which the challenges of the pandemic in terms of service backlog and staff absences continue to have an impact. The new challenge of cost of living rises and in particular rising energy prices, shortages of staff and materials and a widespread increase in hardship across residents provides an additional challenging backdrop for an emerging and transforming council. The added pressures arising from specific challenges like meeting expectations in relation to the response to the war in Ukraine will also impact on the council in an intermittent way over the next six years.

As a result of the pandemic there has been a widespread call for Council meetings to be able to be conducted remotely. West Northamptonshire Council has begun to put in place the facilities for the participation and viewing of meetings remotely. These facilities do not alter the current legislative requirement for meetings to be held in person. However, if new legislation is introduced to allow remote meetings this will have a significant impact on the role of a member and the extent of travel for the attendance at meetings for members of a council with the geographic size of West Northamptonshire.

There is a programme of legislative change including the new Health and Social Care Act 2022 which will have a significant impact on local authorities later this year, when its provisions start to take effect, and these will result in impacts on local authorities and the care sector particularly in terms of the cost of care. Members will receive briefings and support constituents. In addition, the Government has announced a wide range of proposed legislation, relating to devolution, planning, council tax, education, energy, housing, health, crime and justice. The Queen's Speech also included measures of interest to councils on business rates, data reform, public procurement, local audit and post-Brexit regulation.

In particular, the Levelling up Bill published on 11 May 2022 with an [accompanying policy note](#), aims to drive local growth, empower local leaders to regenerate their areas, and ensure everyone can share in prosperity. It is intended to place a duty on the Government to set Levelling Up missions for a period of no less than five years, through a levelling up mission statement, and produce an annual report updating the country on the delivery of these missions. The Bill is also intended to create a new model of combined authority called combined county authorities and to streamline the process for authorities to bring forward proposals for combined authorities to move into directly elected leadership governance models more quickly, to support devolution deals. The Bill is also intended to introduce a number of reforms to the planning system, including strengthening neighbourhood planning and digitalising the system to make local plans easier to find, understand and engage with; by making it easier for local authorities to get local plans in place, with a view to limiting speculative development. Until the legislation has made its way through Parliament it is difficult to know what precise impact this will have on elected members but the programme of change has the potential to be significant for local members.

This review sits within the context of a Council which is in a state of change and flux. Preparing a description of current governance and a case for future governance in this context includes an element of guesswork. It is very difficult to be clear about where the council is likely to be in six years' time or what its arrangements will be. For example, the Council has an ongoing programme of disaggregation of services. The Council has a number of shared services arrangements and a Joint Committee to manage Shared Services, these arrangements may not be required in 2028 if the programme of disaggregation moves at the current pace. The submission presents an analysis, taking into account the likelihood of further change and the lack of certainty about future challenges.

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

This proposal has recognised that in a pandemic, and at other times, there are difficulties in 93 Councillors meeting in a single venue, let alone socially distanced. However, the practicalities of meeting should not impact on the need to have appropriate levels of representation to enable Councillors to carry out their roles effectively.

The remainder of the submission focuses on the size of the Council required to deliver efficient and effective local government. This concludes that a reduction in councillors, at a time when there is a need for every council to focus on delivering efficient governance, will deliver a cost saving. However, West Northamptonshire has already seen a reduction in the number of Councillors from 134 to 93 Councillors under Local Government Reorganisation, and a further reduction to between 77 and 82 Councillors would see the total reduction in the number of Councillors between 2021 and 2025 reduce by 39-43%. It is important to ensure that this does not impact on local democracy; on the ability of local residents to have proper representation and the need for councillors to effectively serve the needs of residents at a time when so many are in need of support.

Local Authority Profile

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

West Northamptonshire is a large mixed urban and rural local authority that has been newly created following local government reorganisation. West Northamptonshire has close links with North Northamptonshire Council which is also undergoing a Ward Boundary review. Our Strategy and Vision can be found on our website here: [Our vision | West Northamptonshire Council \(westnorthants.gov.uk\)](#)

West Northamptonshire has three motorways running through it namely the M1, M40, and M45. The M6 is also easily achievable being only a few miles from Junction 18 of the M1. The area also has a number of key A-roads which impact on communities these include A14, A5, A45, A508, A428, A361 and A43. Overall, transport communication from Northamptonshire to other major urban centres such as London and Birmingham, and to other key towns such as Coventry, Milton Keynes and Bedford, are relatively straight forward making commuting to larger towns and cities reachable for work and leisure purposes.

The Grand Union Canal runs through many of our villages and towns such as Braunston, Weedon Bec, Northampton, Bugbrooke, Stoke Bruerne, Cosgrove to name but a few. The Oxford Canal also comes through our area linking to the Grand Union at Braunston and travelling down to Aynho in the south of the district. We also have the River Nene running through many of our towns and villages and on which the main urban centre of Northampton is based.

Trains run through Northampton on the Northampton loop of West Coast Main Line into London Euston which also stops at the station in Long Buckby and in the south of the county there is a rural station at Kings Sutton on the Chiltern Main Line which runs into London Marylebone. Trains in North Northamptonshire run to other London stations. DIRFT (Davenport International Rail Freight Terminal) is based in West Northamptonshire just outside the village of Crick and a second rail freight terminal is under construction to the south of Northampton. The HS2 rail line is also under construction and will bisect West Northamptonshire to the north of Brackley.

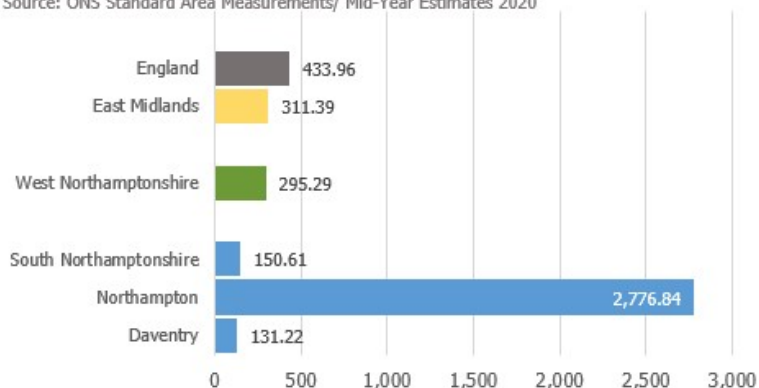
Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?

There are several urban and rural centres within the area including Northampton Town, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley.

55% of the population of West Northamptonshire live within Northampton (the former Northampton Borough boundary area), this equates to 2,777 people per sq km, in comparison the population density in the remaining area of West Northamptonshire is around 90% lower at 282 people per sq km. this results in very different challenges in accessing services, such as public meetings.

Pop Density per Sq KM

Source: ONS Standard Area Measurements/ Mid-Year Estimates 2020

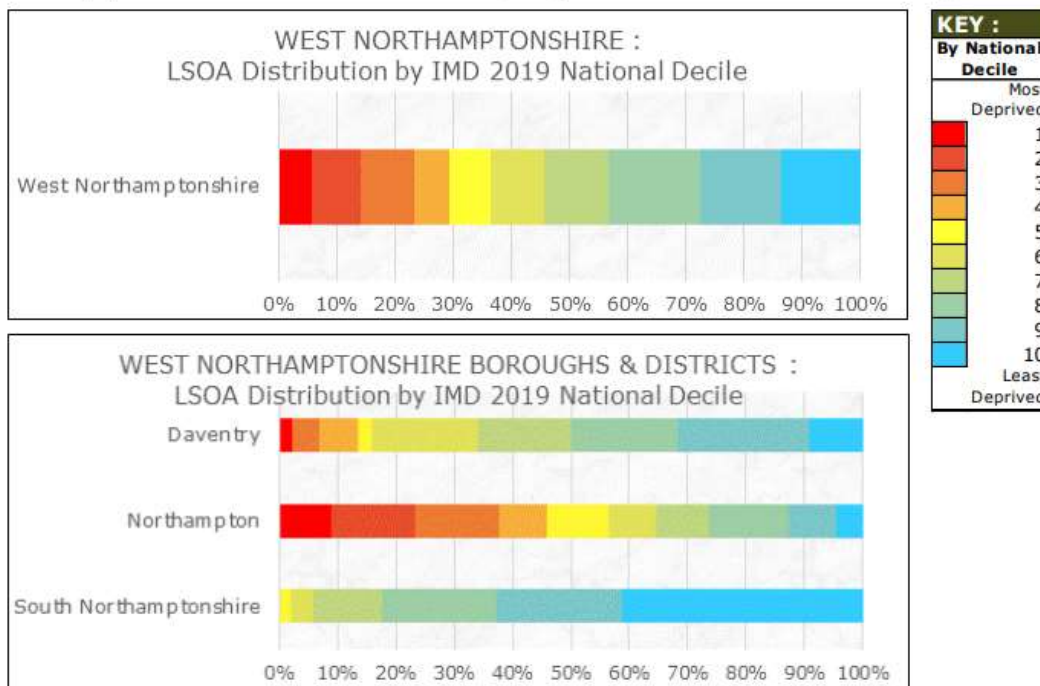


The Council also has sparsely populated wards such as Daventry East and Duston West and Crispin and a significant number of Parish Councils and Parish meetings representing the rural area. The total number of parish Councils and Meetings in West Northamptonshire is 166.

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

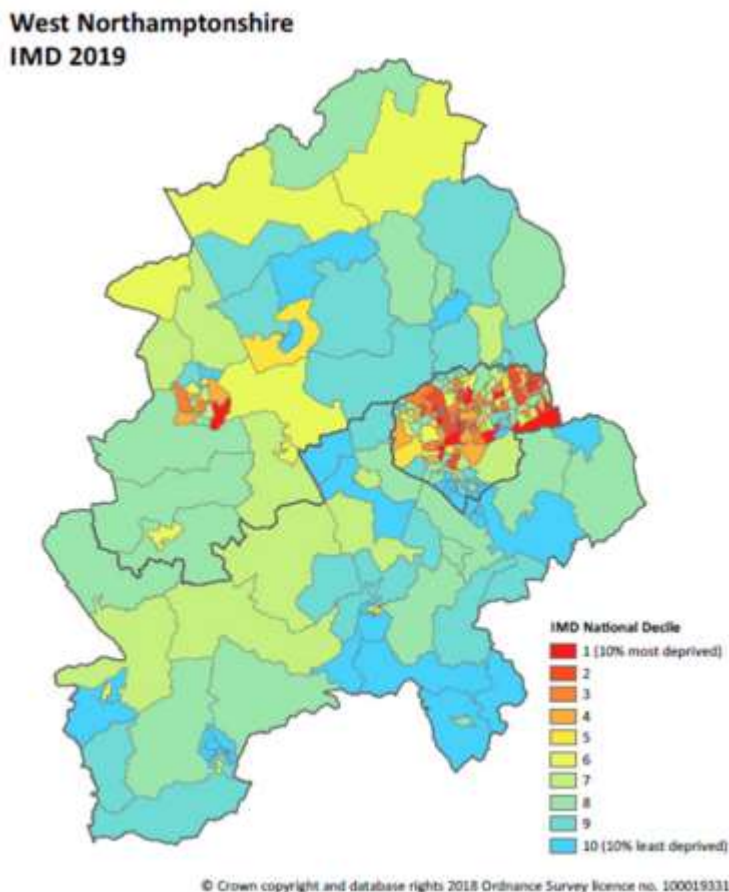
There are different challenges facing the urban wards which have levels of deprivation particularly in Northampton itself but also rural deprivation in areas where there are poor transport links and the cost of housing has been driven up by those moving in from outside the area to commute to London and Birmingham both of which can be readily reached by commuters.

The bar graphs below shows the distribution of LSOAs by IMD national decile for West Northamptonshire.



Details of deprivation and the steps the Council is taking to tackle it are set out in the Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy which has recently been agreed (page 9 sets out the levels of deprivation and a map of the deprivation in specific wards).

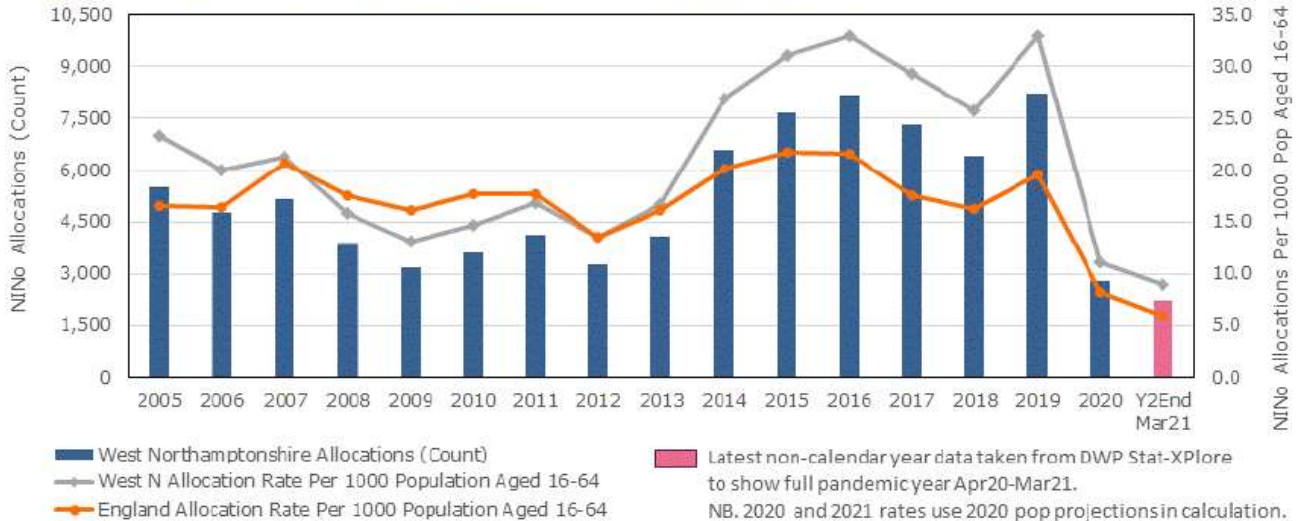
Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?



The Council has an ONS mid-2020 estimated population of 406,733 and an electorate of 299,498 (as at 1st March 2022). We have 184,281 households. The area covers 531.82 square miles.

West Northamptonshire appears to have a significantly higher transient migrant population than the average across England's Local Authorities. Looking at National Insurance (NINo) allocations we know that since 2014 the rate of allocations to overseas nationals per 1,000 population (aged 18-64) across West Northamptonshire has consistently been substantially higher than the England average. In 2019, the gap rose to 13 people/1,000 population when over 55% of the WNC NINOs were allocated to EU2 nationals and 88% were located in Northampton. With Brexit and the pandemic, NINOs allocated to EU nationals have dropped by 82% in the last year while non EU NINOs have dipped by 42% (South Asian recipients down just 31%), resulting in the non EU-group becoming more numerous than their EU counterparts. Whilst this gap is narrower at March 2021 West Northamptonshire remains higher than the England average.

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE : NINo Allocations to Overseas Nationals



In 2019, 9.6% (37,318) people in West Northants were living in income deprivation. This is lower than England (12.9%.) However, Citizen’s Advice have suggested that deprivation data does not give the full picture. They have found that 30% of people accessing their services live in the most deprived areas, but 72% of people accessing their service are living below the poverty line. Over half of those living in poverty live in working households, where work does not provide enough income to meet basic needs or people fall into poverty due to circumstances beyond their control. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation in England and is part of a suite of outputs that form the Indices of Deprivation (IoD). It follows an established methodological framework in broadly defining deprivation to encompass a wide range of an individual’s living conditions. The IMD shows that 16.9% of the population of West Northamptonshire live in the 20% most deprived areas (LSOA). The area with the highest proportion of residents living in the top 20% deprived areas is Northampton (28.2%).

Table 1: The LSOA areas in the most deprived decile on IMD

Local Authority District name (2019)	IMD Rank	Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Decile	LSOA Name
Northampton	185	1	Billing Aquadrome, Bellinge- Fieldmill Road
Northampton	1,139	1	Briar Hill- Ringway, Southwood Hill
Northampton	1,372	1	St James’ End- St James Retail Park, Black Lion Hill, St Peter’s Way, Drapery
Northampton	1,398	1	Kingsheath- Park Drive, West Oval
Northampton	1,520	1	Dallington Road, Merthyr Road
Northampton	1,803	1	Blackthorn Primary School
Northampton	2,238	1	Eastfield park, Grange Road
Daventry	2,375	1	Borough Hill, Trafalgar Way
Northampton	2,420	1	Marriot Street, St George’s Street, Deal Street, Sheep Street
Northampton	2,765	1	St Andrews Hospital, Rushmere Road
Northampton	2,963	1	Auckland Close, Kingsland Avenue, Whilton Road
Northampton	3,065	1	Ecton Brook Road, Pennycress Place
Northampton	3,246	1	Goldings/ Overstone Lodge/ Blackthorn

Electoral Statistics

The electoral make-up of West Northamptonshire comprises:

4 Parliamentary Constituencies
31 Wards
307 Polling Districts
166 Parishes of which 18 are warded

In the North, the electoral makeup for unitary wards is; 264,009 and for parliamentary it is; 243,055.

Electorate and Variance projections from 2021 to 2028

Below is a table showing the Electorate per ward as at December 2021 along with the projected electorate for 2028 following the Council's methodology. As you can see from the table, there are, at present, variances of 20% or over in three wards: Brackley, Duston West & St Crispin and Towcester & Roade and 10% or over in six wards: Billing and Rectory Farm, Daventry East, Moulton, Nene Valley and Sixfields.

In 2028, those variances are predicted to change to the following: Over 20% - Moulton (62.41%) and Towcester & Roade (28.6%). Over 10% - Boothville and Parklands, Brackley, Duston West and St Crispin, Long Buckby, Middleton Cheney, St George and Woodford & Weedon. There is a significant amount of development taking place now and planned for the future in the Moulton Ward.

Name of ward	Number of cllrs per ward	Electorate 2021	Variance 2021	Electorate 2028	Variance 2028
Abington & Phippsville	3	9,319	-3%	9,741	-8.14%
Billing & Rectory Farm	3	10,799	12%	11,324	6.79%
Boothville & Parklands	3	8,760	-9%	9,273	-12.55%
Brackley	3	11,699	21%	12,516	18.03%
Braunston and Crick	3	9,903	3%	10,681	0.73%
Brixworth	3	9,537	-1%	9,761	-7.95%
Bugbrooke	3	9,801	2%	10,205	-3.76%
Castle	3	10,371	8%	11,265	6.23%
Dallington Spencer	3	8,808	-9%	10,003	-5.67%
Daventry East	3	8,239	-14%	10,112	-4.64%
Daventry West	3	9,068	-6%	9,916	-6.49%
Deanshanger	3	9,468	-2%	9,893	-6.71%
Delapre & Rushmere	3	9,175	-5%	10,241	-3.42%
Duston East	3	9,125	-5%	9,393	-11.42%
Duston West & St Crispin	3	7,678	-20%	8,787	-17.14%
East Hunsbury & Shelfleys	3	8,983	-7%	10,435	-1.59%

Hackleton & Grange Park	3	10,212	6%	10,969	3.44%
Headlands	3	10,185	6%	10,466	-1.30%
Kingsthorpe North	3	9,797	2%	10,110	-4.66%
Kingsthorpe South	3	9,383	-3%	11,294	6.51%
Long Buckby	3	8,971	-7%	9,183	-13.40%
Middleton Cheney	3	8,846	-8%	9,186	-13.37%
Moulton	3	11,057	15%	17,592	65.90%
Nene Valley	3	8,572	-11%	10,552	-0.49%
Riverside Park	3	9,949	3%	10,257	-3.27%
Silverstone	3	9,999	4%	10,433	-1.61%
Sixfields	3	11,465	19%	12,866	21.33%
St George	3	8,682	-10%	8,993	-15.19%
Talavera	3	9,721	1%	10,152	-4.26%
Towcester & Roade	3	11,940	24%	13,535	27.64%
Woodford & Weedon	3	9,122	-5%	9,590	-9.56%

In summary, the forecast from 2021 to 2028 for West Northamptonshire looks like this:

	2021	2028
<i>Number of councillors:</i>	93	93
<i>Overall electorate:</i>	298,634	339,281
<i>Average electorate per cllr:</i>	3,211	3,648

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

Health and Care Act 2022

The Council alongside other Councils nationally is currently establishing an Integrated Care System (ICS). This will result in a statutory health and care partnership which brings together NHS organisations and local councils in a partnership of equals, alongside the statutory ICS bodies which will allow the NHS and local government to act as strong partners. The Health and Social Care Act 2022 abolishes CCGs and sets out new governance requirements. There will be an Integrated Care Board with leaders from across the system which is accountable for overall performance and use of resources and Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs).

ICPs will be established which have a central role in the planning and improvement of health and care. They support placed based partnerships and coalitions with community partners. The format of ICPs is not prescriptive but guidance sets out the role of ICP's and encourages each area to develop its own partnerships based on the needs of each area and involving key players in the area. ICP's should bring the statutory and non-statutory interests of places together. **Appendix X** outlines the West Place Governance proposal. The structure of the arrangements is a series of hubs in each placed based area and agreement has been reached with health colleagues that the existing ward boundaries will be used as the building blocks for the areas. Elected members are expected to have a role in contributing directly to

discussions about the needs of their areas. The existing ward boundaries have been used because these have been based around existing communities. This enables local members to have a role in the ICS through the proposed governance. Changes to the size of the Council and this will impact more or less on the proposed wards. As ward boundary changes will be based on communities it is anticipated that the planning for arrangements in relation to the ICS

There will also be new responsibilities for Health and Wellbeing boards which already act as a forum in which key leaders from the local health and care system work together to improve the health and wellbeing of their local population. Under the Health and Care Act 2022 the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBs) has some additional responsibilities and duties.

The ICB and ICP will also have to work closely with local HWBs as they have the experience as 'place-based' planners, and the ICB will be required to have regard to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategies (JHWSs) produced by HWBs. There will be specific roles for those members who sit on the HWBs but there will also be additional responsibilities for local members representing their local areas. The proposals about the specific size and nature of the arrangements are still being developed but a Cabinet Report which envisages a specific role for elected members was considered at the meeting of Cabinet on 14th June 2022 (link below). Appendix C of the report outlines the West Place Governance proposal based on existing ward boundaries. This shows the governance that sits below the Health and Wellbeing Board and Integrated Care Partnership including the locality Health and Wellbeing Forums which reflect the two localities within the West Place; these are Northampton and Daventry/South Northants. The locality boards will oversee the Local Area Partnerships (5 for Northampton and 4 Daventry/South Northants) and will be responsible for ensuring that the Local Area Partnership Plan delivers against key priorities determined by local insight data. The terms of reference for the Health and Wellbeing Locality Forums and Local Area Partnership (LAP) including membership is currently being developed as part of wide stakeholder consultation and engagement

<https://westnorthants.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g687/Public%20reports%20pack%2014th-Jun-2022%2018.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

Characteristics of the Council

The distinctive feature of West Northamptonshire is that it is central. Geographically the Council area is located in the centre of England with good transport to a range of urban centres. This has both positives in terms of Economic Growth but also challenges as it is a place with a mobile population who have the opportunity to work, shop and do business outside of the area as well as locally. The area does not demonstrate a higher level of deprivation than the national average but does have pockets in key areas. There are also examples of hidden deprivation. The makeup of the area is not significantly diverse in terms of demographic pressures, but there are challenges in both the urban and rural areas for in demography, in a growing older population particularly in rural areas and growing diversity. Transport links are very good for travelling to key urban centres out of the area and within the area to Northampton but travelling from place to place within the area is more difficult due to the number of small rural communities. It is therefore challenging for Councillors representing large urban wards attending meetings at the large number of parish councils within their areas. It is likewise challenging for urban members who

represent the deprived wards to meet the needs of the high concentration of deprivation in their area.

The Council’s proposal for Council Size is reflective of these challenges, recognising that there is a need to reduce the number of members to demonstrate efficiency at a time of austerity and hardship for residents, whilst recognising that the need to support and help the most vulnerable of residents requires representation that leaves a single member representing a high number of electors. Whilst comparison with other areas doesn’t answer the question it helps to demonstrate that the proposal will leave members representing in between 4,138 and 4,406 electors per Councillor which when compared to other recent reviews is in the mid-range for other similar councils, particularly those that have undergone local government reorganisation recently. Durham County Council (UA) is currently 4207 electors per councillor but is currently subject to review.

West Northamptonshire	2021	2028	2028	2028	
<i>Number of councillors:</i>	93	93	77	82	
<i>Overall electorate:</i>	298,634	339,281	339,281	339,281	
<i>Average electorate per cllr:</i>	3,211	3,648	4,406	4,138	
	Bristol 2020	Bucks 2027	Dorset 2023	BCP* 2023	Wiltshire 2024
<i>Number of councillors:</i>	70	98	82	76	98
<i>Overall electorate:</i>	341,607	443,064	308,050	309,792	417,228
<i>Average electorate per cllr:</i>	4,880	4,521	3,757	4,076	4,257

*Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole

Council Size

In accordance with the template set out by the LGBCE this submission addresses the key factors in determining Council size below. These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships), and Community Leadership**. The analysis for each area is imbedded within the narrative and summarised in the summary section below.

Strategic Leadership

West Northamptonshire Council has a Leader and Cabinet form of Executive arrangements. The Council is a relatively large unitary authority and is responsible for a wide range of services. As such, it has a Cabinet comprising ten members including the Leader. Each Cabinet Member has a portfolio for which they are responsible. The current Cabinet Portfolios are set out in the 'portfolios' section below.

Leader and Cabinet Model

West Northamptonshire operates a system where the monthly Cabinet meeting is the main forum for taking executive decisions. Decisions are taken collectively by a majority vote of members of the Cabinet. This makes for strong accountability. The Shadow Council set out key principles in relation to its governance model which included transparency, efficiency and accountability and these are supported by the Cabinet and Leader model.

Cabinet meetings are held in public, and this provides transparency and the opportunity for public attendance and questions at meetings. Cabinet meetings are actively attended by members of the public and other members of Council, all of whom may ask questions, make statements, and hold the Cabinet to account as decisions are considered.

In common with other authorities operating executive arrangements, the Cabinet at West Northamptonshire Council is responsible for the formulation of policy. For policies that form part of the Council's policy framework, the Cabinet will consult with the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees, as well as undertaking public consultation, prior to making recommendations for the council to approve. For other policies, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees may also contribute to their development as part of their regular work plans. Portfolio holders will attend Overview and Scrutiny Committees to answer questions on policy development. They will also lead briefings for members on activities undertaken by the Council in relation to policy development.

Portfolio holders also have regular one-to-one meetings with their Director and their leadership teams to provide political leadership on the various matters that need to be considered and decided upon within their own portfolios and across the Council. All of executive members meet every week with the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and emerging issues, specific policy, future decisions and overarching strategy are discussed. The ELT and the executive members also meet periodically at away days to discuss the wider issues such as performance, change and future direction. The Leader of the Council has regular meetings (sometimes involving other Cabinet members) with members of ELT on a one-to-one basis.

The Council also operates a Planning Policy Committee. This is a sub-committee of Cabinet but also includes non-cabinet members including the chairs of each local area planning committee and members of opposition groups. While the decision-making power is exercised by the members of Cabinet, there is a wider accountability in terms of policy development as these other members are encouraged to contribute at these meetings.

The Cabinet has also delegated responsibility for Shared Services and the Children's Trust to two joint executive committees with North Northamptonshire Council – details of these are set out in Joint Arrangements below and these committees are made up of Cabinet Members from both Councils.

Portfolios

The Cabinet comprises ten portfolio holders including the Leader. The portfolios are:

- Strategy (Leader)
- Housing, Culture and Leisure (Deputy Leader)

- Finance
- Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth
- Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste
- Community Safety and Engagement and Regulatory Services
- Strategic Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs
- Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration
- HR and Corporate Services
- Children, Families and Education

The Council considers that this structure and allocation of portfolio responsibilities allows effective oversight of services. There are no strong drivers to change the number of portfolio holders. The maximum number of Cabinet Members allowed is ten and this number does leave some Cabinet Members with significant responsibilities. This is particularly true in the area of Place where there are already 4 Portfolio holders operating, but the benefits of this type of Executive arrangements is that decisions can be made relatively quickly and with the minimum number of meetings and reports to enable focus on the delivery of services rather than the administration of decision making.

As mentioned above, the monthly Cabinet meeting is the main forum for taking executive decisions. Decisions are taken collectively by a majority vote of members of the Cabinet. Individual portfolio holders do not generally take decisions, with the exception of the Leader of the Council, who has authority to take decisions when required by circumstances.

The portfolio holders are supported by a number of Assistant Cabinet Members. These positions provide support to the portfolio holders by focussing on specific areas. Examples of Assistant Cabinet Member portfolios include climate, social housing, education and rail. This structure allows more councillors to become involved in the development and oversight of policy that would ordinarily remain the responsibility of portfolio holders, whilst accountability remains with the designated portfolio holder. This enables the council to maintain accountability but provide those, particularly with specific areas of interest or expertise to make a larger contribution to the Council and to support busy portfolio holders to carry out their roles effectively.

Portfolio holders liaise with partners and represent the Council externally on a number of organisations and joint committees/boards including, but not limited to:

- Shared Services Joint Committee;
- Children's Trust Joint Committee;
- West Midlands Rail Ltd.;
- Environment Agency Flood Committees;
- Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone Board; and
- Northampton Town Centre Business Improvement District Board.

Portfolio holders also attend Overview & Scrutiny committee meetings to give account of their actions and decisions.

There is a significant time commitment associated with the role of portfolio holder. The Cabinet meets formally monthly, with additional meetings held when required.

Portfolio holders represent the Council at political meetings of local government associations. These duties are carried out in addition to their representative role as a ward councillor and any positions they may hold on external organisations.

There can also be very significant commitments of Cabinet members involved in emerging areas for example the Portfolio holder for Community Safety, Engagement and Regulatory Services has become significantly involved in supporting the Afghan Refugee provision, when West Northamptonshire Council took a lead in establishing hotel for housing refugees, supporting them to get the help they needed in the chosen locations and then helping refugees to move on. Similar work is also underway now in relation to Ukrainian Refugees. This type of issue can double the work of a portfolio holder because the significant interest from the media and local residents. Members play a significant role as spokesperson for the Council and in liaising between residents and officers.

Although there is no formal full-time requirement for the role a portfolio holder undertakes, the scope of services the Council is responsible for and the scale of its ambitions require a significant time commitment by portfolio holders. In many cases this will be akin to a full-time position.

Joint arrangements

- West and North Northamptonshire Shared Services Joint Committee. The Joint Committee's role is to oversee the management of those services which are provided on a Northamptonshire-wide basis on behalf of North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils to ensure effective delivery of such services and to provide strategic direction.
- Children's Trust Joint Committee. The West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire Councils have established a Joint Committee to oversee functions that relate to the joint ownership of, and commissioning of services from, the Northamptonshire Children's Trust.
- Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel. The Police, Fire and Crime Panel is responsible for carrying out the powers and duties of the of the Police and Crime Panel as provided for within the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 and the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (Fire and Rescue Authority) Order 2018.

Delegated Responsibilities

- The West Northamptonshire Council operates a scheme of delegation to committees and officers. In line with the stated aims of the Council's corporate plan, managerial and operational decisions are taken, within a framework of democratic accountability, at the most appropriate level; usually the closest point of contact to citizens. The scheme of delegation to officers is set out at section 9 of the Council's Constitution. The effective operation of the delegation scheme relies upon close co-operation and liaison between officers and Members. The scheme of delegation ensures that Council Members are involved in decisions which are of a sensitive or political nature. The Exceptions Charts set out the matters which must be decided by members.

- County Wide Services - West Northamptonshire Council continues to deliver several services which operate for the County as a whole. For example, the Coronial area is Northamptonshire, and Coronial service sits with West Northamptonshire. This is a service which is and will be, until a statutory order is made to amend the Coronial area. The Portfolio Holder is responsible for the oversight of the Coroner's Service and this includes the provision for the death management within the County, inquest hearings and the offices and staff of the HM Coroner who is employed by WNC.
- Police and Fire - The Police Fire and Crime Commissioner is a separate elected role and employs their own staff. The Councils are responsible for administering the Police and Fire Panel which is responsible for holding the PFCC to account. The Committee meets regularly and reviews the work of the PFCC. Members sit on the Joint Committee and complaints about the PFCC are dealt with by the Joint Committee. The Committee also requires annual reports in relation to both the Police and Fire Service and these are scrutinised by the Committee with the attendance of the PFCC and his staff. The support to the Committee is provided entirely by WNC and the committee includes Councillors from WNC Council.
- Shared Services – There is an Inter Authority Agreement between the West and North Northamptonshire Councils (NNC) which governs the services which have not disaggregated. There were 52 services which were shared on 1st April 2022 and there have been several services which have disaggregated. Some of the shared services are the largest and most significant Council services for example the Highways Service is in the process of disaggregating, and this includes the contract for the delivery of the majority of Highways repairs and maintenance. Adult Social Care is also a largely shared service, with the West Northamptonshire Council continuing to provide the bulk of the Adult Social Care Service for the County area. Some services have long-term sharing arrangements. For example, the Head of Coroners and Registration is a joint post hosted by the West. The Coronial service is managed entirely by the West, although regular engagement takes place with officers in the North on key decisions affecting provision, such as the arrangements for death management in the event of excess deaths which is in the North. The Registration Service is disaggregated. Both services report into the Head of Coroner's and Registration. Members sit on the Shared Services Joint Committee and the Joint Committee is also subject to Scrutiny. Support to the Lord-Lieutenant is undertaken by WNC on behalf of both WNC and NNC. Other shared services include IT Operations and Services Delivery, Street Lighting PFI, County Archives, the Countywide Traveller Unit and Payroll are all operated by WNC on behalf of NNC. NNC provide adult learning, safeguarding, school admissions, virtual school, country parks for WNC.
- Children's Trust – The Children's Trust is a separate entity and provides services for Children (excluding Education) for the County. The Children's Trust buys support services from the Councils. There is a Support Services Agreement which governs these arrangements. The majority of the Support Services delivered to the Trust are delivered by West Northamptonshire Council. These include transactional finance and human resources including payroll, IT, assets, insurance and a range of other services. Members sit on the Children's Trust Joint Committee, and it is also subject to Scrutiny.

- Housing – The Council has an arm’s length company – ALMO – delivering its housing stock. Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) operated previously in the Northampton area which is the most significant housing provision in the area, but its area of operation may change as the boundaries for Northampton change with the boundary review. NPH has a very significant capital budget which is larger than that of the Council. Members sit on the Board of the NPH and the portfolio holder is responsible for Housing and the relationship with NPH. The land continues to be owned by West Northamptonshire Council and the Housing Revenue Account continues to be managed through the Council as part of the Council’s budget management. This arrangement covers the Northampton area and in other areas ie. Daventry and South Northants there is a housing association on which members sit as board members but there are no formal management arrangements in place. Decisions are made by Cabinet and scrutinised by the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

Although WNC has a population of 339,281 by 2028 several services are delivered across the whole County area, and this will continue to be the case in some services for the foreseeable future. It is therefore important to recognise that the remit and responsibility of the members is broader than that for other Councils with a similar population and that Members are directly involved in committees which go beyond the scope of boundaries of West Northamptonshire and when combined with North Northamptonshire the population served is currently approximately 760,000 in accordance with mid-year 2020 population estimate by ONS.

Other Standing Committees

- The Council discharges its functions through a number of standing committees:
- Alcohol and Gambling Licensing Committee (15 members). This committee deals with all the licensing functions of the Council under the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005 where such functions cannot be delegated.
- Taxi and General Licensing Committee (15 members). This committee is responsible for determining licensing policy and applications where not delegated to officers.
- Strategic Planning Committee (13 members). This committee deals with large-scale major developments, large commercial developments or strategically important developments.
- Local Area Planning Committees. There are three such committees. These committees consider applications that fall below the threshold for Strategic Planning Committee but above the threshold for delegation to officers. The committees are:
 - Northampton Local Area Planning Committee (11 members).
 - Daventry Local Area Planning Committee (9 members).
 - South Northamptonshire Local Area Planning Committee (9 members).
- Democracy and Standards Committee (9 members). This committee has overall responsibility for the Council’s Constitution, elections and community governance/boundary reviews and the Council’s Code of Conduct.
- Audit and Governance Committee (9 members). The committee is responsible for overseeing the Council’s governance and risk management framework and associated control environment and to provide independent scrutiny of the Council’s financial and non-financial performance and financial reporting process.

- Pension Committee (7 West Northamptonshire Councillors and 2 North Northamptonshire members - 13 members in total). The committee is responsible for the Council's statutory function as administering authority under the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations and associated legislation. West Northants is the administering authority for Northamptonshire.
- Health and Wellbeing Board. The Board is a statutory committee that enables leaders from across West Northamptonshire to secure better health and wellbeing outcomes for the local population, better quality of care for all patients and care users, better value for the taxpayer and reduce health inequalities by shaping the future of services through a more integrated approach to commissioning health and wellbeing related services.
- Senior Appointments Committee (7 members). The committee recommends to the Council the appointment and, where appropriate, the dismissal of chief officers.

Accountability

Accountability is one of the key principles agreed by members when the Council drew up the Constitution in relation to our decision-making governance. They are:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Efficiency
- Accessibility
- Inclusivity

Accountability requires that it is clear who is making the decisions and is responsible for the decisions that are made so that they can be held to account. The Cabinet make the majority of decisions and they are held to account by the Scrutiny Committees. The Council also has two other committees who ensure that the way the Council operates is accountable.

Democracy and Standards Committee

The Committee deals with the Council's Democratic and Governance arrangements and is responsible for reviewing the Council's constitution, decision making arrangements and member training. It also oversees the Council's ethical framework, code of conduct and member complaints. The Committee is responsible for Boundary, Ward Boundary and Community Governance Reviews and deals with electoral arrangements such as polling places reviews. The Democracy and Standards Committee have carried out specific tasks and finished groups on the Constitution and the preparation of this submission.

The Audit and Governance Committee

The Audit Committee deals with the Council's financial arrangements including risk and corporate governance. It reviews and signs off the accounts. It receives the external audit reports and manages the internal audit work of the Council and receives the annual report. It also deals with Corporate Governance arrangements including dealing with risk and assurance. It oversees the Code of Corporate Governance and the Annual Governance Statement and the wider Governance Framework, whistleblowing, anti-fraud and corruption and performance management. It holds the Cabinet to account for the financial safeguards and arrangements for managing the Council's resources.

Scrutiny Arrangements

West Northamptonshire Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements have been designed to maximise transparency and the effectiveness of the scrutiny function. The current structure and way of working has been in place since May 2021.

Portfolio holders and Directors are expected to attend each meeting of the relevant scrutiny committee. This enhances communication between scrutiny, the cabinet and Directors and is an important opportunity for decision makers to be held to account.

The Council's three scrutiny committees are aligned with the principal functions of the Council:

- Corporate Scrutiny Committee (17 members): responsible for finance and resources, corporate services, shared services and corporate strategy and priorities.
- People Scrutiny Committee (15 members): responsible for adult care, public health, wellbeing, children, families and education, housing and communities.
- Place Scrutiny Committee (15 members): responsible for built and natural environment, transport and highways, community safety and regulatory services, economic development, regeneration and growth and scrutiny of flood risk management.

The size of each committee is partly a product of the size of the authority itself and partly to ensure that each political group is represented on each committee. It is important to the success of the scrutiny function that committees are able to draw on the experience and knowledge of a wide range of members and larger committees are a product of this philosophy. However, there is a point where the number of members becomes unwieldy and can even deter members from attending if their opportunities to contribute to discussion are hampered by the number of members. It is therefore suggested that if a reduction of members is agreed that the number of members of Scrutiny Committee will be reviewed at that time (if not before) and consideration will be given to committee sizes not larger than 12 members. A reduction to 12 for each of the current Scrutiny Committees would be 11 places (i.e., 3 from Place, 3 from People and 5 from Corporate) and this would be the same number of members if the Council Size was at the highest number of the proposed range i.e. 82.

The overview and scrutiny function is underpinned by the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Group. This group generally meets informally and comprises the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Its principal function is to oversee the work programmes of the three committees and ensure these do not overlap, thus helping to ensure the process is managed efficiently and work is not duplicated.

The workload of Scrutiny is strictly timetabled. Each Committee has a work programme which work through several workshops and consultations. The work programme is also included as an agenda item at its ordinary committee meetings and the procedure for Members to place an item on Scrutiny is set out within part 7 of the Council's Constitution.

Each committee has the ability to establish task and finish groups. West Northamptonshire Council does not have a dedicated team of scrutiny support, with committees supported by Democratic Services and relevant senior officers, but very much led by members. For reasons of efficiency and resourcing, committees are expected to keep the number of task and finish groups to a manageable level (around 3 per committee). Task and finish panels may draw on the membership of the wider council, but not from the Cabinet.

At this early stage in the Council's life there are limited examples to draw upon, but current task and finish groups include tree policy, the budget preparation and child and adolescent mental health and risk of self-harm. Task and finish group memberships is not fixed but 7-10 members is typical. Meetings may take place every 3-4 weeks until the work is concluded.

Scrutiny Committees also examine the Executive decisions either by being asked, requesting, or calling in decisions of Cabinet.

A review of Scrutiny Arrangements is underway by the CfGS and the outcome of the review is not known at the time of writing. It is expected however that the recommendations of the review will primarily relate to ensuring the effectiveness of Scrutiny and will focus on the size and shape of the Scrutiny Work Programmes.

Statutory Committees

Planning and Development Control

The Council's structure of planning committees is summarised above and set out in more detail here.

The Council operates one overarching Strategic Planning Committee and three Local Area Planning Committees.

The Strategic Planning Committee (13 members) is responsible for functions relating to town and country planning and development control including in relation to strategic applications meeting the thresholds set out in below

- Large-scale major developments defined (by the Government's planning application statistical returns) as those of 200 houses (or 4 hectares) or more; or
- Commercial developments of 10,000 square metres (or 2 hectares) or more; and
- Strategically important developments (as identified by the Assistant Director – Growth and Investment, following consultation with the Chair of the Local Planning Committee for the area in which the development is proposed).

The Strategic Planning Committee also deals with:

- Applications called-in that cross the boundary of two local area committees.
- Any application where the Assistant Director – Growth and Investment considers it inappropriate to exercise delegated powers having regard to the public representations received and consultee responses.

There is no referral of applications from Strategic Planning Committee to Local Area Planning committees.

The three Local Area Planning Committees reflect the areas of the local plans in place in West Northamptonshire:

- Northampton Local Area Planning Committee (11 members).
- Daventry Local Area Planning Committee (9 members).
- South Northamptonshire Local Area Planning Committee (9 members).

The Local Area Planning Committees are not politically balanced as they fall within the political balance exemption for area committees, but they do reflect the political make-up of the relevant area.

The Local Area Planning Committees are responsible for functions relating to town and country planning and development control that do not fall within the responsibilities of the Strategic Planning Committee. These include:

- Major Developments below the limits set for the Strategic Planning Committee;
- Applications which do not meet the criteria for Major Development;
- Change of Use;
- Householder Developments;

- Consent to display advertisements under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992 (as amended);
- Shop fronts;
- Listed Building Consents;
- Conservation Area Consents.

Local Area Planning committees may not refer applications to the Strategic Planning Committee. The Assistant Director - Growth and Investment is responsible for determining whether an application falls within the remit of Strategic Planning Committee or the relevant Local Area Planning Committee, following consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.

Portfolio Holders do not serve on planning committees, with the exception of the Planning Policy Committee (detailed above).

Each planning committee meets monthly, with an additional time requirement relating to site visits where required.

Member Training

West Northamptonshire Council has a robust and comprehensive training and development programme for Councillors that is aimed to equip them with the required knowledge and skills to enable them effectively to carry out their various roles. Councillor training and development comprises both core and mandatory development sessions. Mandatory training includes Licensing training for Members of that Committee, Planning Committee training and all Councillors are required to attend training on the Council's Code of Conduct and associated issues.

Core training includes a general introduction for all Councillors – "Hitting the ground running" - to bring them up to a good basic understanding of their remit and key local government context. A session on Councillor Roles and Relationships that outlines the different roles of Councillors and officers, expectations of each other and how to create and maintain constructive and effective relationships the differing (but complementary) roles of councillors. Committee specific sessions are held, including a session for Councillors on the Audit Committee to understand how to be most effective in this role, and how to draw on the insights of auditors to ensure that the public can have confidence in the way the council is managing its financial affairs; sessions in relation to Overview and Scrutiny, such as work programming and "doing good scrutiny - understanding what makes for effective and impactful scrutiny."

Chairing skills is a key training session for all Chairmen, Vice Chairmen and prospective Chairmen. A session on Local Government Finance covered an introduction to Local Government Finance and picked out the key figures and issues from the previous year's budget. In addition to a comprehensive development programme, regular important briefing sessions are held for all Councillors, for example around mineral and waste planning, decarbonisation of the Pensions Fund. All sessions are currently held remotely over an online audio and web conferencing platform with the aim to maximise

attendance. All training and briefing sessions are recorded and saved into a Teams Channel for Councillors to access again at a later date.

Future Arrangements

The current arrangements reflect transition from three Local Plans to a single local Plan for West Northants. As the Boundary Review changes the ward boundary it will be necessary to redraw the areas of the Planning Committees and at that time there may be a change to the arrangements for Planning Committees. A review of planning arrangements and the planning service is underway. The current arrangements place high demand on the time of officers servicing the three committees and there have been times when planning committees have not taken place. The percentage of decision making to officers is not well understood and this will form part of the review. Area planning committees can increase the risk of in quorate meetings particularly in relation to applications with strong local feeling where areas not of wards are impacted by the proposals and residents are seeking support from their local member to represent their concerns. A review of Planning Committees is likely to bring changes and may reduce the number of committees. It is unlikely however that there will be a significant reduction of work for members in relation to planning matters.

West Northants is an area with good transport links, access to significant motorways and train routes into London and other major cities. It also has land value which are slightly lower than some of its neighbours and fewer planning restrictions in relation to areas designated as AONB or constrained by Topography. It therefore continues to offer significant opportunities for developers and house building. The potential for development will continue to impact on the workload for the Council in dealing with development including planning.

Licensing Committees

West Northamptonshire Council operates two Licensing Committees, as set out above. The first committee is established in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003. The legislation is specific in terms of what can or cannot be delegated. The majority of business is delegated to officers (i.e. non contested applications) or to a sub-committee of 3 members where the application is contested.

The other Licensing Committee deals with taxis and general licensing and its membership replicates that of the alcohol and gambling committee.

Membership of these committees is fixed. It is not anticipated that a change in the overall number of members would have a significant impact on the operation of licensing functions as members sitting on the committees need to have the necessary experience and training and the available members are therefore limited at the current time.

The Council's Licensing Committee discharges most of its functions through licensing sub-committees. These sub-committees meet around 36 times per year to determine the outcome of licensing issues.

Licensing sub-committees are essentially ad hoc, drawing on members of the parent committee depending on availability and the location of the applications or issues under consideration. The time commitment for members can be significant, depending on the issues that must be considered.

When there are several hearings in a short space of time, there is a difficulty in finding available members able to sit on all of them. There is also an issue when the same applicant comes back on a second or third time and it is necessary to appoint a different panel. Licensing is one area where there can be a shortage of members however this could be overcome by the training and appointment of a wider pool of members.

External Partnerships

Council Members are actively involved in the Partnerships at all levels including delivery. Council members sit on several outside bodies and these are appointed by full Council and the Executive as appropriate. These appointments vary in their nature and complexity. Members are also active in several joint arrangements in which they are acting as the council and not as representatives. Some of the external bodies are separate legal entities and members are required to act in accordance with the relevant legal requirements. Company directorships require councillors to carry out the duties of company directors and act in the interests of the companies on which they serve as set out within companies' legislation. Councillors sit on several voluntary and charitable bodies as trustees. Members are required to understand and carry out the responsibilities of trustees in carrying out these roles. These responsibilities are in addition to their roles as councillors. A full list of outside bodies appointments is presented to council and cabinet for approval after each election in order to make the relevant appointments.

Community Leadership

West Northants Council was created in unprecedented times. Northamptonshire was the most significant Local Government Reorganisation of recent times which disaggregated large county wide services into two new councils. Splitting the County Council frontline and support services created significant complexities in data management, in staffing, finance, and accommodation, the provision of technology solutions and direct service provision to customers. The transition work took place across not just the four councils of the West but also the Districts of the North of the County. Staff and members had to learn to work together and deliver this complex transition at a time when they couldn't meet in person or travel. At the same time the eight Councils were placed under significant additional strain responding to the need to deliver enhanced social care provision and respond to unprecedented situations created by the pandemic. Local government reorganisation in Northamptonshire was externally imposed to respond to crises rather than a planned and desired programme of improvement. Nevertheless, West Northants Council has thrived in its first year and come through it with a balanced budget, having closed not less than ten unresolved previous sets of accounts, has delivered a nationally recognised high level of response to provide refugee centres to respond to the crisis facing Afghan refugees and is currently responding again to the crisis arising from the war in Ukraine.

This level of achievement has been a combined effort of the officers and members of West Northants Council and the contribution made by partners and residents to bring about this transformation in public service. There is, however, inevitably a lot more to do, transition in West Northants is ongoing and the next phase will define the future relationship between the council and those it serves.

Residents are facing unprecedented financial challenges with a rising cost of living and many businesses still reeling from the effects of the pandemic. There will be a period of low or no economic growth; unprecedented environmental challenges to reduce carbon and waste; social polarisation between local communities as the effects of the financial challenges are felt; significant legislative change and re-organisation in areas like social care and health; and rising demand for services. All these factors combine to place significant strain on the delivery of local services and the roles of elected members who represent their local areas.

West Northants is a reasonably sized unitary Council and has the potential to provide a real step change in local services in the years ahead, but this depends on the contribution of local members to provide the conduit to Council services for residents in times of change. Local councillors work to champion the views of people and communities and provide local democratic leadership, in a way that is often not recognised. West Northants Council supported by local councillors will work hard to stimulate good local economic growth and engage with local communities encouraging them to contribute to their local areas and play their own part in driving the economy. Councils, and councillors, will need new approaches to do this successfully, such as utilising less formal social networks, participatory democracy, better engagement with young people and a broader influencing role, rather than the more formal traditional structures we associate with the public sector. There are crucial roles for councillors in providing visible civic leadership to enable and support the work of others. Councillors work hard to foster strong relationships within local

communities, with Parishes and local voluntary groups to identify individuals from all walks of life, and organisations from all sectors who want to play a role and to inspire others to do the same and more. There is a need for Local ward councillors to reclaim their leadership role as the accepted and mandated voice of citizens. They need recognition and support, to help them enhance their role as key influencers and door-openers to other community leaders who can make things happen.

Councillors in West Northants are supported to carry out roles in their communities through training and briefing which is detailed in the section above on training and in addition a range of other briefing and training sessions have been held through the year to support members to understand their new roles for unitary council. In order to illustrate how members are currently carrying out their representational roles are attached to this document as an Appendix. These documents have been produced by councillors in different parts of the area, in different roles and from different political groups.

Area Committees

Discussion has taken place during transition about whether to follow other local government reorganisations and create area committees. The decision recognised that unlike other councils there was limited capacity and opportunity to consult with communities during the pandemic. It was also felt that the new Council should have the opportunity to decide its future governance arrangements. It is recognised that formal committee arrangements can be a barrier to effective engagement. At the current time the proposal is to establish Local Area Forums as outlined in relation to the ICS and to use this as a way to comprehensively engage with local communities and to involve local elected members without the need for formal committees. The question of Area Committees remains an option open to the Council to consider if a need is identified for a formal decision-making forum.

The Council has recently established a Youth Forum for the Northampton area and is in the process of looking at replicating this model across the whole council area.

The Council has undertaken a comprehensive engagement exercise entitled the Big Conversation which engaged residents and staff (separately) to understand their aspirations for the Council. The Big Conversation is conducted by external consultants with specific expertise with conducting consultation conversations with residents. The consultation engaged with a broad range of individuals and details of the profiles of participants shows the diverse spread of participants.

In relation to the residents' element of the survey the consultants read and analysed 682 written contributions (ideas and comments) as well as a total of 6,332 votes (likes and dislikes). The written contributions were thematically coded, resulting in 29 initial codes, which were then laddered up and organised in 10 themes put into three main categories. In the order of their relevance these were:

- Urban planning, development and services
- Communication and citizen engagement
- Council role, responsibilities and structure

Specifically in relation to the last category they collected 50 written contributions and 421 votes. Their summary of the contributions is set out below:

- Participants main requests related to councillors being more responsive, treating residents well, attending meetings, having clear accountability systems and ways to measure success.
- A popular idea was the creation of a Youth Council or department to address the needs of young people.
- There was a controversial discussion around WNC's area coverage, but despite differing opinions, it appears that participants' main concern was whether WNC will manage to meet the needs of all its residents in such a large area.
- There was a small discussion around the role of the Parish Councils and while some requested more resourcing to support increasing responsibilities, others insisted that Parish Councils should not be lumbered with more tasks.
- The Council will respond to the exercise with specific actions to respond to the points made and this may lead to further changes in the way that local councillors are supported to engage with local communities.

Case Work

The approach to casework varies with different Councillors, in order to give a flavour of the different approaches we have included samples from members from different political groups and different parts of the local authority to show how members work with communities.

Summary and Conclusion

West Northants is a new Council. The area of the Council has recently seen a reduction in council members from 134 to 93 Councillors under Local Government Reorganisation

This submission has assessed the effect of a further change in Council size on local democracy; on the ability of local residents to have proper representation and the need for councillors to effectively serve the needs of residents at a time when so many are in need of support. The consultation exercise undertaken recently with a broad spectrum of residents demonstrates that residents are concerned about the need to ensure that all areas are adequately represented under the new West Northamptonshire Council and that residents are concerned about the responsiveness of elected members. There is therefore a need not to maintain sufficient councillors to represent residents and carry out the community leadership role effectively. On a rough estimate each ward could not tolerate the loss (on average) of more than half a member across 31 wards. For these reasons the Council has determined that it would not be able to serve residents adequately if the reduction was greater than 16 and Council size was reduced below 77 members.

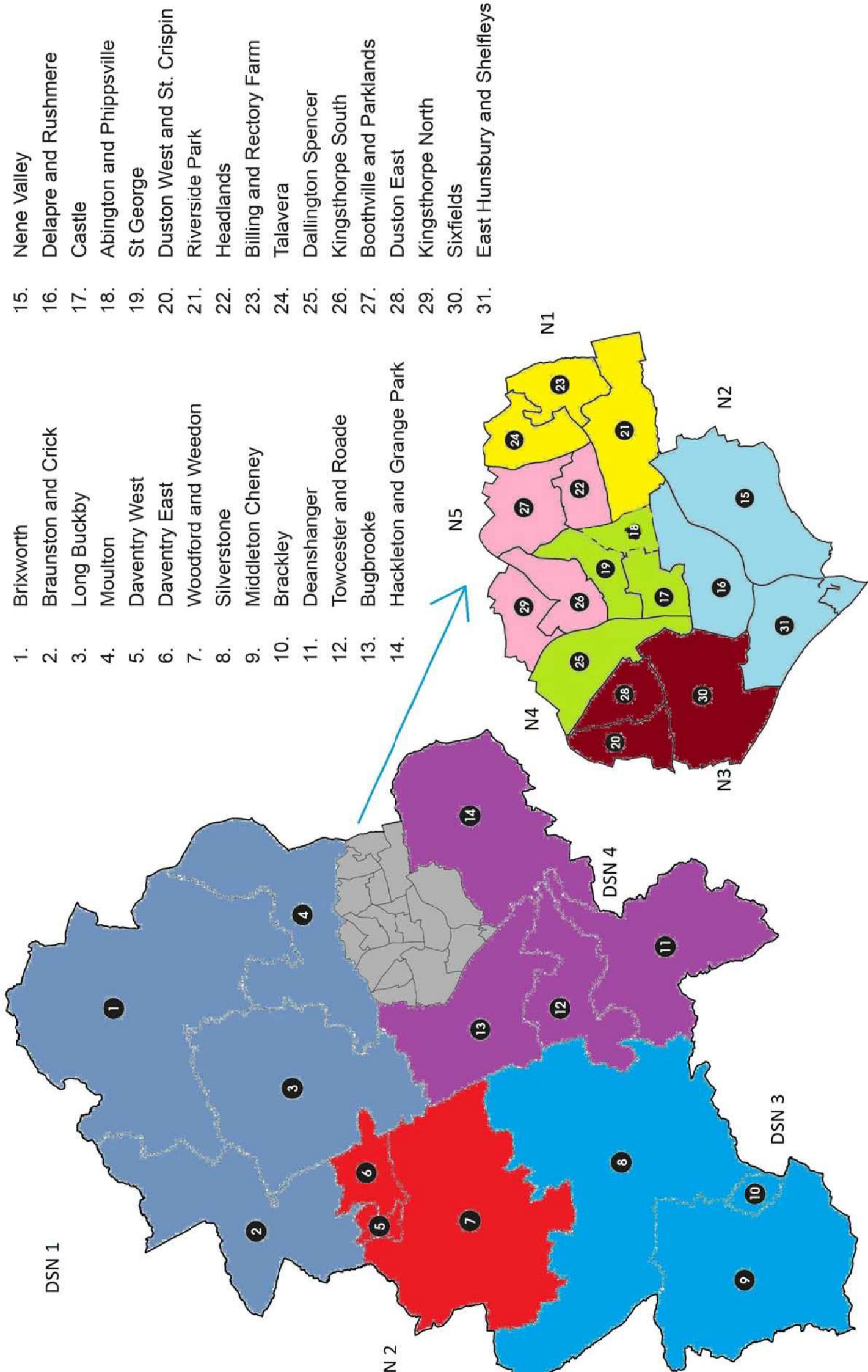
The submission has set out a number of areas where future governance needs remain uncertain. For example there may be a need to review the current planning committees, the question of committee or executive arrangements remains subject to review, there is an ongoing question about whether the number of members on the scrutiny committees is too large to support effective debate in scrutiny meetings, there is doubt about whether there will be an ongoing need for a shared services committee as disaggregation progresses and the council is engaged in putting in place local area forums to support the new ICS. The demands of these arrangements on elected members and whether or not there will be a future need for area committees remains subject to ongoing work. Changes under consideration could both increase and decrease the number of councillors required. New area arrangements are likely to operate across all councillors regardless of the number of councillors and shared service arrangements only affect Executive members. The most significant impacts on council size are considered to be those related to the number of planning committees and scrutiny places. The proposed upper figure is based on an assessment of a reasonable reduction in the number of Scrutiny Places ie 11. Therefore whilst it is difficult for the Council to set out definitive governance arrangements to inform the size of the Council it is proposed a reduction to 82 could be readily achieved without impacting negatively on the governance of the Council.

This submission therefore proposes a range of between 77 being the figure below which the council feels representation would be compromised and 82 being the figure which could be readily achieved without impacting governance. The additional proposed reduction of between 77-82 would see the total number of Councillors available to residents reduce between 2021 and 2025 by 39-43%. The Council has undertaken a temperature check against other comparable councils and is satisfied that the ratio of electorate per member within the size proposals in this submission would put the Council in the mid-range of ratio for similar councils at between 4138 and 4406 electors per Councillor

This submission therefore concludes that, taking into account the governance requirements (so far as they can be ascertained), the need for robust scrutiny and other arrangements

and the need for effective community leadership, a council size within the proposed range will best meet the needs of West Northamptonshire. The Council therefore recommends a reduction to between 77 and 82 Councillors on West Northamptonshire Council from 2025.

West Northamptonshire Unitary | Electoral Wards



Community Engagement

<p>Councillor Andrew Grant – Conservatives Member for Hackleton & Grange Park ward</p>	<p>Councillor Jonathan Harris – Liberal Democrats Member for Brixworth ward</p>	<p>Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere – Labour Member for Billing & Rectory Farm ward</p>	<p>Councillor Ken Pritchard – Conservative Member for Deanshanger ward</p>	<p>Councillor Daniel Cribbin – Conservative Member for Moulton ward</p>
<p>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</p>				
<p>We are active in our communities and attend various functions and events. Telephone and email is also a significant way of dealing with issues in our areas.</p> <p>Attendance at Parish Council Meetings.</p>	<p>I have worked hard to raise my profile, and through newsletters and social media, my contact details are available to all. I have dogs and I walk them every day within Brixworth (which is the largest populous within the ward). I invariably interact with residents almost every time I do this.</p> <p>There are councillors and councillors - my approach is to be recognisable, proactive and accessible rather than just wait for case work to arrive.</p> <p>We do regular targeted community surveys across the ward to identify local issues. This provides the information to work with Parish Councils where possible or to take a progressive approach to issues that need resolving. This enables me to identify patterns and priorities across the ward. Examples of this include rural transport/</p>	<p>The key factors are in relation mainly to the urban areas, particularly the poorer areas. It is not just about Councillors signposting people to services etc., but there is an element of having to guide them through it, which takes time, often having to repeat it. In these areas, there are more housing, street scene, fly tipping, anti-social behaviour, planning issues in particular in relation to HIMO issues that the ward Councillors have to deal with too.</p> <p>Due to the diversity of the urban communities' extra time is spent on asylum applications, domestic abuse and modern slavery issues.</p>		

MEMBER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CASEWORK

	<p>connectivity, the looming cost of living crisis which is already indicating wider cases of hardship and the possible requirement for a community larder, even in this rural area, the isolation of the elderly and greater opportunity for active travel connectivity (cycling/walking etc.), climate and environmental issues such as clean air, protection of green space and the climate emergency.</p>			
<p>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</p>				
<p>The Council does not currently have area committees, localism arrangements are addressed in the main report.</p>				
<p>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</p>				
<p>We contribute regular information to parish magazines which are delivered to all properties in the area. We use Social Media i.e. Facebook.</p> <p>Councillors regularly hold surgeries and attend senior clubs.</p> <p>Many councillors also represent WNC outside bodies on top of council meetings and various allocated committees. I have 3 parish councils in my patch. Also, I work and meet with</p>	<p>Facebook page.</p> <p>'Live' listening posts (been on hold since COVID times).</p> <p>Newsletters to all doors 3 - 4 times a year, additional ad hoc newsletters for particular issues within communities.</p> <p>Update posts providing council information on village Facebook pages (announcements/grant schemes or applications processes / COVID information.</p> <p>Councillor website page.</p>	<p>Councillors engage with constituents in various ways. In some areas surgeries work. Labour group councillors do send out newsletters and many use social media to communicate.</p>		<p>In my Ward we do not hold regular surgeries, but all legacy Daventry area councillors do link in with the local MP and attend action days across the WNC area. There are surgeries held across the legacy DDC area and regular coffee mornings with the MP and Councillors. The aim is to have one or two a month across the area. This is a relatively new initiative which links in our MP and ward Councillors as we find this gets a better</p>

MEMBER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CASEWORK

<p>Local PCSO's on a regular basis.</p>	<p>Parish newsletter to Parish Councils and Meetings. Annual Councillor report to parishes Councillor Annual report to all doors 1-1 liaison with Parish Clerks and Chairs</p>		<p>attendance and is of more benefit to our residents. We attend our parish councils when we can. My ward has 12 parish councils and we split our time between these. In my ward each Councillor has been allocated their own villages as a primary contact point. We then pick up the majority of issues in that area. Collectively we all will pick up issues for all areas, but we publicise a particular Councillor for an area so as to maintain a strong personal link for our villages. This is easier to do in our ward as we are all from one political party. In wards where there are members from different parties this is more difficult to achieve thus putting more of a burden on each councillor in terms of workload. We actively publicise our contact details to each parish/village and our door is always open. We are in</p>
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MEMBER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CASEWORK

				<p>regular contact with each parish - often daily discussing local issues with them.</p> <p>Our details are published in local village magazines resulting in the ability for residents to contact us when needed.</p>
<p>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?</p>				
<p>A Youth committee is being set up and will give all councillors the opportunity to engage with young people. Many councillors have close connections with minority groups depending on the area they represent.</p>	<p>There are very few minority groups within this ward. Our biggest challenge is interacting with young people and working and engaging with younger members of the community – it is clearly an area we intend to focus on.</p> <p>Some Parishes are considering Youth Councils, and this is an area I believe I can support them to implement.</p>	<p>A number of our Labour Group have good working relationships with various youth work organisations, minority group umbrella organisations for example, the Northampton Bangladeshi Association, Northampton Town of Sanctuary, the Association of Northamptonshire Supplementary Schools and the Somali community. Our group is diverse, and this helps with how we engage with harder to reach communities.</p>	<p>Parish Meetings – Old Stratford, Wicken, Deanshanger- monthly meetings which last about 2-3 hours plus preparation and travel.</p> <p>Members will attend meetings if asked to and help as needed.</p>	<p>We link in with our parish councils who often have links with these groups. For example in Moulton the Parish Council is very good in catering for young people and other minority groups through the Community Centre and Local Community Connector scheme. As Councillors we actively support this and promote these services to those in the area and also showcase these services with WNC.</p>
<p>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?</p>				
	<p>There are no specific expectations however, I attend as many Parish Councils and Parish Meetings as I can. For example, I estimate I have</p>	<p>Whenever they can our councillors do attend residents' meetings and where there are Parish Council meetings. With some</p>		<p>We attend our parishes when we can (we have 12 parishes in our ward. It is often difficult to attend every meeting as often</p>

MEMBER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CASEWORK

attended over forty of these meetings in the 12 months since the start of WNC. I fundamentally believe that my role as a Councillor is to act as a connector for parishes and parish conceals and to join up the dots, share knowledge, experience, and ideas from around the ward.

I have facilitated residents' meetings - for example with Futures Group regarding social housing issues.

I have also organised Parish Council and West Northants Officer meetings on specific issues. (EG Spatial Consultation).

Actively involved in COVID Volunteer Support - identification and co-ordination of volunteers (110 volunteers during peak COVID lockdown period).

Active involvement in Homes for Ukraine - liaising with Council and Hosts as well as the establishment of an outreach hub at Brixworth Library.

residents' groups they struggle with participation and a lot of the engagement is via social media. Rejuvenating these groups is a great need.

they fall on the same evening or clash with other council or personal commitments). Our involvement will be listening to local issues and concerns and giving advice about how to solve these based on our extensive knowledge of how local government works.

We are all very experienced councillors with over 20 years' experience each. We will feed back to WNC any issues which need to be followed up.

MEMBER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CASEWORK

	<p>An understanding of, and engagement with the community, allowed for the full allocation of the COVID support grant in a timely and focused way.</p>			
<p>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?</p>				
<p>As elected councillors, we all have a number of Parish Councils or town councils within our ward. Council Colleagues - we attend all meetings to report on the work of the Council both locally and District wide. Taking questions and dealing with issues which may arise.</p>	<p>I take a proactive role in providing information to Parish Councils and Parish Meetings. There is no specific area governance in this ward. I take the perspective that a ward councillor should not just respond to case work and enquiries but rather take a more strategic view to progressively identify and change/champion specific areas of challenge for the ward. For example, the Brixworth ward is extremely rural and there are major challenges regarding public transport and the isolation of older people. I have worked with a local community bus provider and during the last year have re connected 4 villages with a once a fortnight or once a week in the instance of Scaldwell, community bus service.</p>	<p>A number of the Labour Group are also Town Councillors. They also work closely with colleagues who are just Town or Parish Councillors.</p>		<p>The Council does not currently have area committees but Daventry District did have an area committee type group working in the Moulton Ward which met with officers and parish councils to discuss issues relating to planning and highways and other related issues as a result of the new SUE's being built in the ward. This arrangement is currently being considered by WNC with this DDC group being used as a template for future area committees. I was Chairman of the legacy Daventry Standards Committee for many years and I often gave advice to local parish councils about governance issues that arose in my ward.</p>

MEMBER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CASEWORK

Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?

As a council we could perhaps involve our parishes more with regard to governance. Having said that NCALC does give good advice to parishes. Issues relating to governance of parishes will fall to WNC and the monitoring officer to resolve initially. To date as members we have not had any issues to deal with on the Democracy and standards committee.

Other

Full Council - Northampton 4/5 per year, last about 3/4 hours plus preparation and travel to Northampton.
 Northamptonshire Police Crime and Fire Panel - 4/5 meetings per year – last about 4 hours plus preparation and travel to Northampton.
 Northamptonshire PCFP- Commissioners Complaints Hearings max 2 per year, last about 2 hours, plus prep and travel to Northampton.

MEMBER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CASEWORK

			<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 4/5 meetings per year - last 2+ hours plus prep and travel to Northampton.</p> <p>Pension Board- 4 meetings per year, last about 2/3 hours plus preparation, on Zoom.</p> <p>Local Area Planning Committee - (Vice Chair) Monthly Meetings. last approx. 2/3 hours plus Preparation and travel to Towcester.</p> <p>Plus, briefings previous days last about 1 to 2 hours plus any site visits.</p> <p>Substitute at meetings 4/5 per year, average length 3 hours.</p> <p>By choice I do try and attend part of the Cabinet meetings each month for 1 to 2 hours on specific subjects to 'keep abreast' of what is happening.</p>	
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MEMBER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CASEWORK

			Adhoc meetings and visits since Jan 1 till 30th April number 17+.
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Casework			
How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?			
Through Officers, MP's, NHS as necessary to get a satisfied outcome.	I take the approach that if I can deal with the issue directly then that is what I shall do. There are of course instances where officer engagement is required to achieve resolution. I take the view that the building of productive and professional relationships with officers in key directorates is invaluable. As a group we hold 6 - 8 weekly meetings with the most senior heads of functional directorates to review broader issues that may be emerging from casework (pattern identification) and also to deal with any outstanding casework.	Although the Councillors have the same number of electors to other wards, the workload in these areas is heavy. A key role is helping people to navigate the system and having to explain this a number of times which takes time.	Case Work Last year dealing with Floods, Bus, Planning, Gigaclear problems plus other various issues – approx. 2 Hours per week. Training – Pensions, Planning etc all via Zoom etc. Spatial Strategy – Dealing with members' numerous enquiries and this is ongoing.
			I have a hybrid approach to case work. We have a members enquiry email which I will send issues through to for follow up in most cases where the issue is complex. This is of great benefit to me. However, the results do not always provide an adequate response for the resident and further follow up and personal intervention is often needed. Therefore I find a more personalised approach of telephoning officers works. If the issue is a simple one then I will often deal with it without involving members enquiries. With over 20 years' experience as a Councillor often matters can be

MEMBER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CASEWORK

				easily dealt with without too much involvement of the council just by using local knowledge.
What support do members receive?				
A central system of recording and being passed to officers to answer the issues raised.	Support is generally good from Council officers if relationships are built.			Member's enquiry email. Political assistant
How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?				
We need to be flexible in using all types of communication, so all groups feel part of the Council in how they are dealt with.	<p>The option of hybrid meetings is crucial and should be maintained (as per during the pandemic) and ideally enhanced.</p> <p>My personal view is that the legislation that allowed for remote access to committees during the pandemic should not have been removed as it provided greater access, particularly for councillors who work full-time, to be able to join from remote locations. It has been extremely useful from a resident point of view as video calls are now the norm for a large number of people and this has meant greater access to residents without the need for face-to-face meetings or surgeries.</p> <p>A concern the still exists however is that there are many, particularly some senior</p>	Still an area that needs developing. We are fully aware that there are those who do not engage with technology or are digitally excluded due to living conditions/ affordability		Email and zoom meetings have really helped in the past 2 years. However, this is no substitute for face-to-face meetings and getting out there and seeing residents.

MEMBER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CASEWORK

	<p>residents, who do not have access to the internet. What I would like to see is a restoration of outreach services in libraries where councillors can be present and supported by officers - for at least once a week for several hours. To facilitate this, it may be necessary to provide flexible times such as out of office hours.</p>			
<p>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</p>				
	<p>There is a heavy reliance on Twitter and Facebook for the provision of announcements e.g., grant applications which specifically precludes accessibility for many.</p> <p>There is a heavy requirement on online accessibility and the reliance on the ability to complete online forms.</p> <p>Street doctor has been in existence for many years and despite constant reminder from residents there is either a reluctance to use the system or a lack of ability to do so.</p>			<p>Not aware of how we do this. For officers to explain more fully. We certainly as members do seem to get involved in a lot of issues which WNC could deal with at a more "Council" level.</p>