

Blaby District Council

Council Size Submission

On behalf of Blaby District Council

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How to Make a Submission

1. It is recommended that submissions on council size follow the format provided below. Submissions should focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them.
2. The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

About You

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

This submission is made by Full Council and Officers of Blaby District Council.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

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

A full review of electoral boundaries for the District was recommended by the Local Government Boundary Commission due to the length of time since the last review in 2003, where the number of wards were reduced from 21 to 18, and due to significant variances emerging since the last review in the distribution of electors.

Local Authority Profile

5. Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description may cover all, or some of the following:
 - Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?
 - Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
 - Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
 - Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Blaby District is situated at the centre of England, to the South-West of the County of Leicestershire and covers an area of 129km². The population is 101,526 ¹ living within approximately 43,400 households. Blaby is one of 7 Leicestershire district authorities, being bordered by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, Harborough District Council, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council and Leicester City Council. The district of Blaby is a mixture of urban and rural settlements with 80% ² of the population living in areas classed as 'urban', with a diverse set of needs, including those due to the proximity to the city of Leicester. The District contains 27 settlements with Braunstone Town, Narborough, Whetstone, Leicester Forest East, Countesthorpe and Blaby are the most significant settlements in terms of population. New Lubbethorpe development is adjacent to the urban area of Leicester.

Major transport links running through it such as the M1, M69 joining to thoroughfares to the City of Leicester through the district via the A563, A5460 and the B4114. Travel-to-work patterns indicate a strong functional relationship between the City and many settlements in the district. The railway station at Narborough has direct links to Leicester and Birmingham. The district is within easy travelling distance of 2 international airports. Fosse Park is one of the busiest retail parks in the country, attracting 11 million visitors a year.

The district makes a desirable place to live, with plenty of green spaces and leisure activities, such as walking and cycling. There are important routes to employment in conurbations such as Leicester, Coventry and Birmingham, additionally there are major employers with their headquarters within the district such as Next plc and Santander. Both Leicestershire County Council and the Police Headquarters are situated within the district. Blaby District is ranked as 281st least deprived district in England³

The District has 39 elected councillors, serving 18 wards, with the majority controlling group being the Conservative Party (25 Conservative, 6 Labour, 6 Liberal Democrat, 1 Green, 1 Independent). There are 2 Members of Parliament representing the geographical area covered by the council who both represent the Conservative Party.

Whilst the majority of our services are provided in-house, we have a range of partnerships including leading on Building Control, and outsourced provision such as Internal Audit and Procurement.

Blaby District Plan 2021-2024:

Our Vision is for a district made up of thriving and vibrant communities where people are happy to live, work and visit.

Our Blaby District Plan⁴ for the period 2021 to 2024 sets out how we, with support from our close partners, will ensure that Blaby District is a place where people are happy to live, work and visit. We want to build and maintain vibrant communities, where people are safe and healthy,

¹ ONS 2019 est.

² Source: 2011 Rural Urban Classification, ONS, 2013. 2018 mid-year population estimates, ONS, 2019.

³ IMD 2019

⁴ [Blaby District Plan 2021-2024](#)

businesses are successful and offering quality employment, and where opportunities exist to develop our local attractions for the benefit of all. We want Blaby District to be a place with excellent services and outstanding public spaces for everyone. We want all of our residents to have access to great opportunities and be able to live healthy, safe, independent successful lives.

Our key priorities are to make Blaby District a place people want to 'Live, Work and Visit'. These priorities are supported through clear underlying aims, and by our People Strategy focusing on staff and the way we work, and our Financial Plans of how we manage income and expenditure to deliver sustainable, effective services for our residents.

Key Statistics:

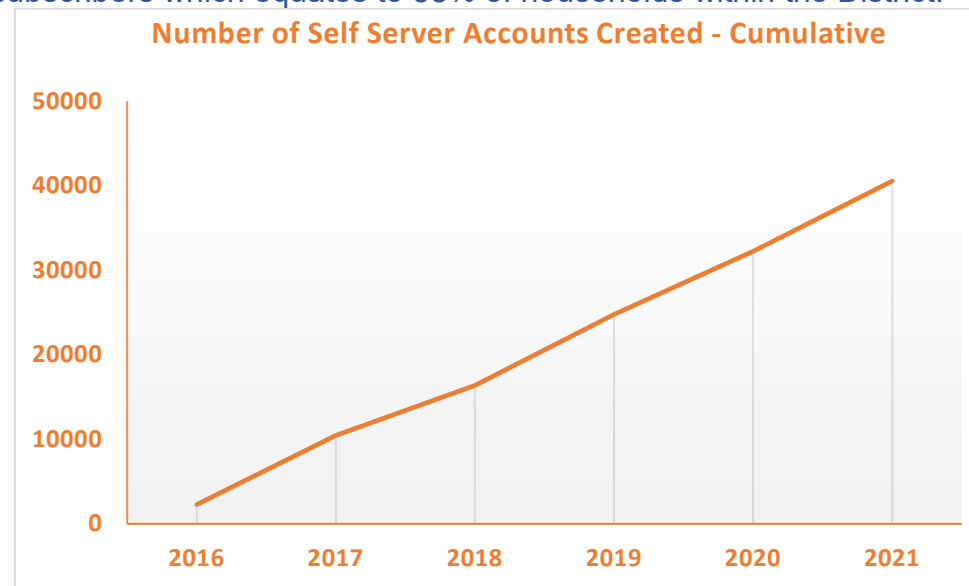
- The current population of the District is 101,526.
- The population is forecast to be 112,354 by 2027⁵, which is a 10% increase from 2019.
- The registered electorate as at December 2020 is 77,412 which means that approximately 3.2% of the adult population are not registered to vote. The Council has a high level of uptake on the Electoral Register with approximately 96.8% of the adult population currently registered to vote.
- The age profile as at 2019 shows that those aged 17 and under made up 21% of the population, 18-64 years were 59% and those aged 65 and over make up 20%. This profile is not forecast to change significantly by 2027. Between 0.5% and 0.8% of the population reach voting age each year.
- The greatest population growth forecast in numbers is in the 0-15 year's age group (21,299 people) followed by the 16-19 years (4,891). This may have an impact on the numbers eligible to vote in future years following 2027.
- There is a growing population of minority ethnic groups, 11.5% of residents identify as from a Minority Ethnic Group⁶.
- Leicestershire is the 26th Healthiest Area in the UK (ONS Health Index for England 2015-2018).
- Blaby District is ranked as 281st least deprived out of 317 local authority districts in England in 2019.
- Education, crime and to a lesser extent health domains rank lower in terms of deprivation.
- There are 10 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) that are within the 4th and 5th Decile of the IMD (fall within the 40% and 50% most deprived LSOAs nationally).
- The socio-economic make-up of the district of Blaby is mainly within the 'Rural Residents' and 'Suburbanites' classifications.⁷
 - There is a mix of 'Hard-Pressed Living' and 'Urbanites' in the District.
- On the whole employment is high with 83% of the working age population being economically active.

⁵ ONS Population forecast (2018)

⁶ 2011 Census

⁷ Source: 2011 Rural Urban Classification, ONS, 2013.

- 54% of those aged 16+ are employed within management, professional Scientific and Technical sector occupations.
- Blaby experiences the highest earnings in Leicestershire; the gross annual earnings for Blaby residents in 2020 was £30,341, the average for Leicestershire is £25,970 and England is £26,055. However, earnings were higher for male employees than female employees.
- Generally, unemployment is lower than average, being currently 3.8% in the District⁸ verses 5.5% for the East Midlands and 6.4% for Great Britain.
- However, unemployment in the 18 to 24 year age group is particularly high at 7.6% when compared to the general population and the East Midlands as a whole at 7.4% (Great Britain 8.9%).
- Demand from potentially homeless people has increased over the last year, with a total of 728 new enquiries a 21% increase on 2019/20 figures.
- The use of the Council's website⁹ to access information and services, including the submission of online forms, continues to grow. There are a total of 42,414 people signed up to 'My Account'¹⁰. Many services, such as finding out the day of local bin collections, moving in notifications for council tax and building control applications are now available online, with 117 customer facing forms available. The Council has 26,500 e-newsletter subscribers which equates to 58% of households within the District.



⁸ ONS Claimant Count: April 2021

⁹ www.blaby.gov.uk

¹⁰ As of 30th June 2021

- Blaby District Council receives only 8.61% of the total Council Tax it collects from each household. This amounts to just over £5.9m of the £68.4m it collects in the District. The Band D Council Tax stands at £173.32¹¹.

Forecast Growth:

Growth in the district is carefully planned to ensure that the right housing, in the right places, is based on the needs of our residents. The total Households 43,400 as at 2020.

There is a total forecast 2,524 new homes planned to be built from 2021 to 2027, giving a total of 45,924¹² homes, including at new Lubbesthorpe. Lubbesthorpe is bordered by the M1 to the east, and the M69 separates the housing and employment sites in the new development. It is forecast to have 1,250 additional residences to 2027, and eventually a total of 4,250 new houses to be complete in the 2030's.

The Local Plan Core Strategy (2013), which sets out the scale of growth and locational strategy for the District from 2006 to 2029, states that there is a requirement to provide an additional 68 hectares of employment land within the District. At 1 April 2020, approximately 40 hectares of employment land has been built and a further 59 hectares of employment land has been identified in the District for employment land, which will provide job opportunities for existing and future residents. In addition, the District is host to a range of leisure and retail facilities around junction 21 of the M1 motorway. Recently, an extension to the Fosse Park Shopping Centre was opened which provides a range of jobs within the retail and hospitality sectors.

The New Local Plan will set out a blueprint for how the District will grow and change over the next 15 years and beyond. Consultation took place early 2021 and focused on options to location of future development, all reasonable site option promoted by landowners and developers, and initial information about the main policies we expect to include.

Key Future Challenges and Priorities:

- Covid-19 response and recovery in particular around economic, community and health and wellbeing. It is recognised that this will have long lasting implications and will impact directly on those challenges listed below in one way or another. This includes the issue of food poverty which increased during the pandemic when the District had 9 food banks operating including one at Blaby District Council. Many of these are still operating.
- Tackling unemployment, particularly in the 18-24 age group, by working with partners to deliver local employment and training opportunities.

¹¹ [Recommendations of the Cabinet Executive: Council Tax 2021/22](#)

¹² The 2016 ONS projection was 44,632 homes by 2027

- Continue support for homelessness as a significant increase in demand is due to increased housing applications and eviction notices.
- The implications of the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the national increase in domestic abuse cases.
- Delivery of the Council's Climate Change ambitions and championing the Green Agenda.
- Working with Health Partners to provide and promote a holistic and preventative joined up service.
- Deliver 'Digital by Choice' services and provide suitable alternative options.
- Grow a strong leisure and tourism sector, playing an active part in the Blaby District Tourism Partnership.
- Local Land Charges changes to migrate the register to the HMLR accessible digital service.
- Support the most vulnerable people in the District, working closely with voluntary groups, Parish and Town Councils.
- Development and delivery of the Blaby Local Plan.
- Innovate and transform our own services by working differently, ensuring the best outcomes for customers including developing the skills and knowledge of staff and Members to improve service delivery.
- The Chief Executive of Blaby District Council is retiring in August 2021.

The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 years. The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

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

Since the last boundary review in 2002 Full Council adopted the Leader and Cabinet Executive model of governance on 14 December 2010, which came into effect in May 2011. The latest review of Polling Districts, Places and Stations was conducted in September 2019. There are 39 councillors who represent 18 Wards in the District with elections held every 4 years. The Cabinet Executive is made up of 6 Members and the Leader of the Council appoints the Deputy Leader plus 4 Members to sit on this Committee.

The Council's Constitution¹³ is subject to a continuous review process and a delegation by exception scheme forms an integral part of the arrangements. The Constitution underwent a major revision and the new version, which was actively reviewed by Members, was approved by Council on 24 May 2016. Amendments to the Constitution are brought before Council as part of the continuous review process.

A Peer Review carried out by the LGA in 2015 described Blaby District Council as “a great council which is performing well with no major concerns. There are many examples of good services and projects with a strong focus on doing the right thing for Blaby’s residents and customers at all levels of the organisation.” A further review was carried out in 2018 and was again very positive in terms of staff engagement, progress against our action plan and as excellent partners. The Peers also flagged up improvements and opportunities that needed to be taken by the Council. An action plan was formulated and a number of these recommendations have been delivered. The pandemic has resulted in a delaying a further review being carried out in 2020, however this is now being planned to take place after the current Chief Executive has left the authority, (in August 2021), and a new Chief Executive has been appointed. Regular Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet meetings take place to agree strategic direction and long term planning.

Council Size

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

Strategic Leadership

7. Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified.

Topic		
Governance Model	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i>

¹³ [The Council's Constitution](#)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i> ➤ <i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Full Council is made up of 39 Councillors and is responsible for deciding on the Council’s overall budget and policy framework and setting the budget each year. The Leader of the Council is elected for a four year term and can appoint 6-10 Members to the Cabinet, including a Deputy Leader.</p> <p>Cabinet members have specific responsibilities for particular services and take decisions within the budget and policies agreed by the Full Council. The Council meets seven times a year with the ability to hold extraordinary meetings for urgent issues.</p> <p>The roles and responsibilities of the Cabinet Executive, the non-executive members, the Scrutiny Commission and the Senior Leadership Team are set out in the Council’s Constitution which provides a comprehensive framework for the management of the authority’s business. This is supported by a formal Scheme of Delegation.</p> <p>Scrutiny Commission hold the Cabinet Executive to account. Policies setting out how services will be delivered to customers are decided by Councillors. Both Scrutiny and the Portfolio Holders are actively involved in policy development and approval will be made by Council or in certain cases delegated to Cabinet Executive.</p> <p>We propose that the Council maintains the current Cabinet model with 6 members including the Leader and Deputy Leader. This continues to be an effective governance model for the authority as it broadly reflects the service groups within the Council and enables effective and efficient decision making and policy development.</p>
<p>Portfolios</p>	<p>Key lines of explanation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i>

	Analysis	<p>There are currently 6 Portfolios which broadly reflect the service groups within the Council. Each Member has an area of special responsibility covering numerous service areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leader 2. Finance, People and Performance 3. Neighbourhood Services & Assets 4. Health, Wellbeing, Community Engagement & Business Support 5. Housing, Community and Environmental Services 6. Planning Delivery and Enforcement, and Corporate Transformation <p>The Council has previously approved a recommendation from the Member Development Steering Group to adopt a comprehensive “Members Roles and Responsibilities”¹⁴ paper which sets out role profiles and the required skills and knowledge for the various roles Members fulfil in discharging their responsibilities. This includes the role of a Portfolio Holder and what is required of them.</p> <p>Portfolio Holder roles are intensive with a broad range of responsibilities, some are also appointed to other appropriate committees including the Appointments and Appeals Committees. Executive Members can also be appointed to Outside Bodies and represent the Council on external partnerships. Cabinet Members cannot be Members of the Scrutiny Commission, however they are required to attend meetings. They are supported by the Senior Leadership Team. Although, the role is not a full time position, Portfolio Holders currently combine their role with employment and a range of caring responsibilities.</p>
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i>
	Analysis	<p>Part 2, Article 4 of the Constitution details the functions carried out by Full Council, this includes a range of functions which by law cannot be delegated. All 39 Councillors are members of Full Council and take part in decision-making. The Cabinet Executive consists of 6 Members, its terms of reference and the scheme of delegation can be found at Part 3, Section 1.</p> <p>The roles and responsibilities of the Cabinet Executive, non-executive members, Scrutiny Commission and the Senior Leadership Team are set out in the Council’s Constitution which provides a comprehensive</p>

¹⁴ [Members' Roles and Responsibilities](#)

	<p>framework for the management of the authority's business, this is supported by a formal Scheme of Delegation.</p> <p>Day to day decision making is carried out by appropriate officers in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation (which is based on a delegation by exception principle) and in accordance with Financial Regulations. These arrangements all contribute to the economic, efficient and effective operation of the Council. The whole suite of standing orders, financial regulations and scheme of delegation are reviewed and updated as required through regular reports to Council.</p>
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Accountability

8. Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role.

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i> ➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i> ➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i> ➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i> ➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i> ➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i>
Analysis	<p>Scrutiny helps ensure that the Council delivers its objectives, by creating an open, transparent mechanism for Councillors to shape, question, evaluate and challenge its policies, decisions and performance. Scrutiny's role is distinct from the role of the Cabinet Executive but not in opposition to it, its role is that of a critical friend.</p> <p>Blaby District Council has a scrutiny structure made up of three main elements:</p>

1. Scrutiny Commission – has 18 non-executive Members and meets every 6-8 weeks on pre-arranged dates and times, it may also call Special Meetings to consider items as it sees fit. The Commission scrutinises Cabinet Executive decisions and co-ordinates all Scrutiny activities including its Work Programme. In addition to its normal business, the Commission also examines Council Budgets annually with Portfolio Holders and Senior Managers to hold them to account for managing the finances.
2. Scrutiny Commissioners - are the management board of the Scrutiny Commission. They are also responsible for the delivery of the working group reviews and support and sponsor the groups in their work. There are three Commissioners selected from each political group with the largest number of seats. The Commissioner from one of the two largest minority groups is appointed as the Chair of Scrutiny.
3. Three Scrutiny Working Groups - are set up as required by the Scrutiny Commission, with additional meetings arranged at the discretion of members of that Working Group to undertake work programme reviews, carry out specific projects or carry out tasks which require more time than can be given to them in the scheduled meetings of the Commission. Working groups do not have to be politically proportionate and they work on a task and finish basis. Any non-executive Member can be on a working group - not only members of Scrutiny Commission. Any Task and Finish Group meetings will be in addition to Working Group meetings. Members will report back regularly at the appropriate Commission meeting

Scrutiny Commission has the power to review and scrutinise:

- the priorities and objectives of the Council;
- the policies the Council adopts to meet those objectives;
- the Council's performance in meeting its objectives;
- the decisions taken by the Cabinet Executive, committees and officers;
- services, bodies or issues which affect the well-being of people in the District.

In addition to scrutinising decisions and actions taken by the Cabinet Executive, Scrutiny Commission can also play a role in developing and proposing new policies and helping to monitor and improve existing policies.

The Scrutiny process provides an opportunity for Councillors and, in some cases, external representatives, to examine various functions of the Council, to ask questions about how decisions have been made and to

	<p>consider whether service improvements can be put in place. It provides an opportunity for them to champion issues of public concern and to participate in the development of new policies. It facilitates debate about priorities, budget, the strategy of the Council and its vision for the District. Scrutiny reinforces the Local Authority's leadership role in promoting the well-being of the local community because it can enable reviews of services, provided by other organisations to be carried out.</p> <p>Pre-decision Scrutiny is one of the ways in which Scrutiny holds the Executive to account. Scrutiny Commission regularly reviews the Cabinet Executive's Forward Plan (the timetable of future work) to decide if there are any key decisions coming up that it would like to examine or comment on. It may question officers and Executive Members about planned decisions and seek the views of local people or other interested parties. Officers may be asked to explain and justify the advice they have given to members of the Cabinet Executive prior to decisions being taken. The Scrutiny Commission may refer recommendations or comments onto the Cabinet Executive to be considered when a proposed decision is discussed.</p> <p>Scrutiny may also be involved in the development and review of policies and strategies as part of the consultation process, as an additional research resource and as an enquiring and challenging investigator.</p> <p>As well as scrutinising proposed decisions, Scrutiny Commission also reviews decisions which have been made by Cabinet Executive. The Call-in procedure can be used to prevent decisions being implemented until they have been discussed by Scrutiny Commission. Call-in's are rare at Blaby District Council due in part to the emphasis on pre-decision scrutiny and early engagement in decision making.</p> <p>The intention would be to review Scrutiny Commission as part of a future governance review programme.</p>
Statutory Function	This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?
Planning	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> ➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i>

	Analysis	<p>The current proportion of the planning applications determined by members are: 2018: 44, 2019: 37, 2020: 34 95% of applications are delegated to officers. The scheme of delegation at Part 3, Section 6 of the Council's Constitution ensures that major applications, and applications 'called in' by Members are considered by Committee, this ensures that the Council meets performance standards to determine planning applications within the remits set. The Council has a single Planning Committee which is held every 4 weeks with 13 committees held annually and comprises of 11 Members.</p> <p>A review of the Planning Committee was carried out in 2014, which resulted in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reduction in Members from 17 to 11 • Changing the name of the committee from Development Control Committee to Planning Committee. • Annual Planning Committee training to which all Members are invited and is mandatory for members of the committee and potential substitute members. • A dedicated Planning Committee Handbook which is reviewed annually. • Planning Masterclasses held throughout the year as part of the Member Development Training Programme. <p>It is accepted that Executive Members will not normally be members of Planning Committee, however may substitute for regular Members in exceptional circumstances. The Portfolio Holder is not eligible for membership.</p> <p>The majority of Member's who responded to the recent survey felt that the arrangements worked well and that Planning Committee is effective so no further changes are planned.</p> <p>The time commitment for members includes reading the agenda, and any associated background reports on the Council's website, participating in regular training sessions, attending site visits prior to the committee, and meeting with Planning officers if and when required. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman also receive a briefing before each committee from officers.</p> <p>Before the Covid pandemic, Members were required to attend a site visit before the Committee was held, during lockdown when meetings were held via Zoom, site visits were paused and have yet to recommence. Members are currently provided with aerial photographs and images of the sites to supplement the site visit. A review of site visits will be undertaken in the future.</p>
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Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year? ➤ And what will be the time commitment for members? ➤ Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc? ➤ Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?
	Analysis	<p>At the meeting of Annual Council on 27 May 2015, Council approved that the Licensing Committee and the Regulatory Committee be merged, and be known as the 'Licensing & Regulatory Committee'. The Licensing & Regulatory Committee also has 2 sub-committees:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Licensing Sub Committee (Panel) to hear and determine applications, licence reviews and other such matters 2. Private Hire/Hackney Carriage Regulatory Sub Committee to determine any licensing suspensions or revocations pursuant to appropriate legislation. <p>The Licensing & Regulatory Committee consists of 13 Members and meetings are held 4 times a year, with Licensing Panels being held as and when required to hear any cases as they arise. 3 Members and a reserve Member are called off the list of 13 Members of the Licensing & Regulatory Committee when the need to comprise a Panel arises. Members are required to attend a training session before they can sit on any Licensing Panels and complete a significant amount of pre-reading prior to Panel meetings.</p>
Other Regulatory Bodies	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What will they be, and how many members will they require? ➤ Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.
	Analysis	<p>Audit & Standards Committee</p> <p>In May 2019, the Audit and Standards Committee was established to replace the stand alone Audit Committee and Standards Committee. The terms of reference for the Audit & Standards Committee were amended to reflect good practice from leading professionals in this field, including other local authorities. The Chairman of the Committee continues to receive a Special Responsibility Allowance to reflect changes in duties and attends annual training. The Audit & Standards Committee has 7 members appointed to it and meets 4 times per year.</p> <p>The Audit remit and functions are based on the guidance set out in a CIPFA publication which identifies best practice in relation to roles and responsibilities. The Committee meets quarterly and receives regular reports</p>

		<p>from both the Section 151 Officer and the Audit Manager. Arrangements are in place for the Audit Manager to report independently to the Audit Committee should he/she feel it appropriate to do so.</p> <p>The Standards main remit and function is to monitor the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct and to consider reports from the Monitoring Officer on material breaches of local codes. Due to the fact that the need for Members to meet regarding Standards issues is normally ad hoc, meetings for this purpose are scheduled as and when needed by the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman.</p> <p>Employment Committees</p> <p>The Council has various committees related to employment issues as below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals Committee – 5 members • Chief Executive's Remuneration Panel – 3 Members • Chief Executive and Directors Appointments Committee – 5 Members • Grievance Committee – 5 Members • Joint Staff Consultative Committee – 5 Members
External Partnerships	Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.	
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i> 	
Analysis	<p>One of the core values stated in the Blaby District Plan 2021-24 is to 'Build and maintain strong partnerships to meet the needs of the district'. Councillors play an important role in delivering this. A number of Councillors are appointed to external bodies, including local and consultative groups and community organisations. These appointments vary in nature and workload, with some being allocated to Cabinet members based on their portfolio responsibilities, and others being allocated to ward councillors where the body operates within their ward. ¹⁵</p>	

¹⁵ [Appointments to Outside Bodies](#)

	<p>Our Partnerships include East Midlands Council’s, District Council’s Network, Local Enterprise Partnership, Tourism Partnership, and Community Safety in Partnership with Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council. Member representation on these partnership bodies is an important role of the elected councillors.</p> <p>A number of the Council’s services are being delivered in partnership with other local authorities and public sector organisations’ such as Health. These arrangements are monitored by strategic partnership boards which takes some of the governance burden off of Members. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading on the award winning Lightbulb service providing Disabled Facilities Grants and support to vulnerable people across the County. • The Local Land Charges Partnership with other District Councils and LeicesterShire Land & Property Searches offers customers a straight forward and easily accessible search service. • The Leicestershire ICT Partnership who lead on both strategy and operational services for a number of local authority organisations. • The Building Control Partnership which Blaby DC is currently leading and working with 6 Leicestershire and Rutland Councils.
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Community Involvement

9. The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties?

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> ➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i> ➤ <i>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?</i>

		<p>➤ <i>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?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i></p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Councillors are actively involved within their Wards and most consider themselves to play a pro-active part in the communities they represent. The approach taken varies from councillor to councillor but all are involved in some or all of the following as part of their engagement with constituents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constituency matters • Community / Resident meetings • Working with and / or offering support to community groups and local organisations • Attending Town and Parish Council meetings. 87.5% of Blaby District Council Members surveyed also serve as Parish/Town Councillors. • Articles for Parish/Village magazines and newsletters and/or websites and social media <p>There are a number of ‘twin hatters’ and ‘triple hatters’ with councillors representing constituents on Blaby District Council, Leicestershire County Council as well as a Parish or Town Council. The Council does not have any area committees in the District and there is no Ward Member delegated budget.</p> <p>The survey carried out with Members in May 2021 shows that a variety of methods are used to communicate with constituents. Traditional methods are used less widely, with only 13% of respondents holding constituent surgery meetings and just 22% using letters. Email (100%) and telephone (96%) communication being by far the most popular methods used. Social media use is at nearly 40%, but face to face meetings with individuals is also used by a third of members who responded.</p> <p>The Council has a Youth Council¹⁶ that meets every 4 weeks and throughout the year will provide young people with the opportunity of ‘Councillor Shadowing’ to get a flavour of what it’s like to be a local councillor and how democracy works in practice. The Council has elected a Member as Youth Champion to be the Council’s lead and act as a figurehead to bring about positive change by supporting the development of young people. In addition to the Youth Council Champion, the Council also appoints Member Champions to lead on Green</p>

¹⁶ [Blaby District Youth Council](#)

		<p>matters (climate change) across all Portfolio's and an Armed Forces Champion which has recently achieved the Silver Award from the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme.</p> <p>The Members survey indicated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48% of Councillors attend Parish/Town Council meetings on a monthly basis. • Approximately 74% of Councillors indicated they spend on average of between 3-20 hours per week on Blaby District Council Business, spending most time reading reports and attending Council, or Parish/Town Council meetings. • 61% of Councillors stated that they consider this amount of time to be proportionate. • 87.5% of Councillors indicated they are also elected as a Parish/Town Councillor. Where this is the case Councillors are advised to distinguish where they are acting in a District Council capacity for different agenda items. • Including attendance at Full Council, each Councillor is appointed, on average, to 3.7 committees. • Data collected for the review indicated that there were 67 Council and Cabinet meetings in 2019/20, out of these, 10 were cancelled. This figure does not include Scrutiny Working Groups or briefings. • This ratio has increased from the average ratio of 1:1954 stated in the Boundary Commission 2004/05 Final Review to just 1:1985 in 2019. With the current number of 39 councillors, the projected councillor electorate ratio for 2027 is 1:2163.
Casework	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>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?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i> ➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i>
	Analysis	<p>In general, Councillors take individual approaches to dealing with their casework, this could include referring to an officer for help and advice, utilising training material such as the Members Handbook which provides useful signposting guidance and fellow Ward Councillors. Regular feedback from Members suggests that helpful and timely information and support is received from officers and other members of the council.</p> <p>In order to support members, a cross party Member Development Steering Group considers all training and wellbeing needs of elected members with recommendations being made direct to Council/Cabinet Executive as</p>

		<p>appropriate. The ultimate purpose of the work of the Steering Group is to champion learning and to ensure that all members are provided with opportunities for training and development which allows them to work effectively as a local community representative and member of the council.</p> <p>The Member Development Strategy¹⁷ sets out the Councils approach to developing Councillors during their term of office. All Councillors when they are newly elected or with many years of experience have a duty to their communities, the Council and themselves to ensure that they have they have the skills and knowledge to carry out their wide ranging and fast changing roles. The Member Development Steering Group has led on and been successfully awarded the East Midlands Council's Member Development Charter and the Charter re-accreditation.</p> <p>The Council has previously approved a recommendation from the Member Development Steering Group to adopt comprehensive role profiles¹⁸ to provide clarity for Councillors, Officers and the public about what is expected of each role and the required skills and knowledge for the various roles Members fulfil in discharging their responsibilities. The Members' Roles and Responsibilities also supports Councillors in their development by providing a checklist to identify their development needs, both for the roles they are currently undertaking and for future roles to support succession planning.</p> <p>The Democratic Services Team provides a first point of contact for Member enquiries, signposting guidance on the Member constituency role and offer a Buddy system, particularly aimed at new Members. The team consists of FTE of 3 Officers with additional support from the Democratic Services & Governance Manager and the Corporate Services Group Manager who is also the Monitoring Officer. A monthly Members E-bulletin is prepared containing updates from services across the Council including our Partnerships along with upcoming training opportunities. A weekly calendar is emailed to all Members containing the following week's committee meetings and training sessions.</p> <p>Technology has become increasingly important in supporting Council business and Members have all been provided with the opportunity to own their own iPad. All Members have council e-mail addresses assigned to them upon appointment. During 2020 to 2021 Members have become greater accustomed to using technology to access remote meetings. Although still required to attend formal meetings at the Council Offices, there is</p>
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¹⁷ [Member Development Strategy 2021-2023](#)

¹⁸ [Members' Roles and Responsibilities](#)

		opportunity to continue to use this technology for meetings with officers and residents as appropriate, therefore members will be required to spend less time at the offices or travelling in the future on district council business.
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Other Issues

10. Respondent may use this space to bring any other issues of relevance to the attention of the Commission.

Financial Considerations:

A total of £284,886.09 is spent by the Council on member allowances and expenses annually (2019/20).

Attendance:

In 2020/21, attendance at Council meetings was good with an average of 87% attendance. All Members attended at least 71% of meetings. However, this was during the COVID pandemic, when all meetings were conducted remotely online. In previous years attendance has been around 78%. On returning to meetings taking place at the Council Offices there is evidence that the pre-pandemic levels will be once again be typical, with attendance at Annual Council on 25th May 2021 being 76%.

Local Government Nearest Neighbour Group Comparisons:

Key council size data has been compared for statistically similar councils based on the groupings given by CIPFA's Nearest Neighbour Model for English authorities. The average Elector / Member Ratio of our Nearest Neighbours is 2045:1.

- The adult population is forecast to rise to approximately 86,170. Assuming that, as currently 3.2% are not registered, the electorate for the District will be approximately 84,375 by 2027.
- Currently there are an average of 1,985 registered electors per Member of the Council. This is lower than with Nearest Neighbour Authorities who have a mean of 2,045 per Member. This means if the number of Members remains at 39, by 2027, this would result in a ratio of 2,163.
- There is significant new housing developments being built across the district including the new settlement of Lubbesthorpe. The population forecast takes account of these increase in homes. This will be key when considering the next stage of the boundary review and potential changes to ward boundaries.

The table below shows the breakdown at council level.

Area	Council Size	Registered Electors March 2020	Ratio electors to individual member
Stafford	40	105403	2635.1
Hinckley and Bosworth	34	89051	2619.1
Bromsgrove	31	75497	2435.4
Selby	31	69876	2254.1
Gedling	41	89887	2192.4
North West Leicestershire	38	81246	2138.1
Rushcliffe	44	90821	2064.1
Blaby	39	77846	1996.1
Rugby	42	82160	1956.2
Mendip	47	91093	1938.1
Tewkesbury	38	72440	1906.3
Chorley	47	87635	1864.6
Lichfield	47	83460	1775.7
South Ribble	50	86125	1722.5
Staffordshire Moorlands	56	79300	1416.1

Recent Local Government Boundary Commission Review Recommendations:

The average Member Count and Elector / Member Ratio of recent review are shown in the table below.

Council	Current Member Count	Member Ratio Current	New Member Count	Member Ratio Future	Member Count Notes
Charnwood	52	2549	52	3100	Same as previous
Wolverhampton	60	2960	60	3034	Same as previous
Rushcliffe	44	2064	46	2509	Increase from 44 due to significant Population growth (18%)
Blaby	39	1996	36	2344	Reduction by 3
Chesterfield	48	1651	40	2200	Reduction from 48
North Kesteven	43	2070	43	2134	Same as previous

Summary

11. In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future. Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate any other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

The following Council size options were considered:

Reduction to 36 councillors:

The growth of the population to 2027, based on the analysis above, will increase by 10%. Taking current trends and forecasts this will give a total of registered electorate of 84,375. This would give a ratio of 2344 per Member an increase of 359 electors on average. It is believed that this would be considered manageable, within appropriate, acceptable limits and is in line with the average when compared to our Nearest Neighbours currently and proposals for the future.

In terms of workload, it is believed that the Members would continue to serve on the same number of committees as they do currently. As detailed above, we have undertaken reviews of the majority of committees over the last few years which has resulted in a reduction of members appointed per committee, and led to more effective and efficient decision making. Currently all non-executive members are charged with providing challenge to the Cabinet Executive by serving on 3 Scrutiny Working Groups and on Scrutiny Commission. It is the intention of the Council to review Scrutiny Commission in the future.

As for attendance at meetings, all members attended 70% or more during 2020/21 with an average of 87%, however, it should be noted that these took place after the introduction of virtual meetings due to COVID restrictions. In previous years attendance has been around 78%. With a return to face to face meetings Annual Council in May 2021 saw attendance of 76%. It is considered that even if Council/Committee meetings remain face to face, many informal meetings with officers will continue to be held virtually.

In terms of Members work within their constituency, the Member survey showed that just 3 councillors hold regular councillor surgeries. 100% of members who responded stated that they now use email as a tool to correspond and there is an increase in the use of social media to communicate with residents. 50% of respondents attend every Parish Council meeting in their area ensuring that there is good engagement with the community.

With the increase in the use of digital technology, the council is much more transparent and residents are better able to directly access services and information by use of the Council website. There are 117 online forms available that enables customers to also complete many processes through online forms at a time to suit the resident rather than only in office opening times, making services much more accessible. Evidence tells us that customers are keen to engage with technology with over half the adult population of the District registered for 'My Account' with the Council. The Accessibility Act 2021 ensures that as many of our customers as possible are able to use the website. However, we recognise that there are residents who do not have access to the internet or do not want to choose to use it to communicate and access services. We are determined that we will continue to offer suitable alternative options, including contact with councillors, for delivering our services and information.

The equality impact assessment indicates that the current make-up of Council Members is not entirely representative of the population of the District, however it concluded that a council size reduction does not significantly further exacerbate barriers to becoming a councillor.

Like many local authorities, Blaby District Council has its financial challenges, and reducing Councillor numbers could allow funds to be utilised in other ways.

Retain the current number of 39:

Based on current forecast population for 2027 the ratio of number of electors to each councillor would be 2,161. Although this would be an increase from the 1,985 currently it would fall well below the average of a number of recently completed boundary reviews of other Councils.

The Member survey carried out in May 2021 gave feedback that on the whole councillors felt that their workload was proportionate.

It is recognised that although the District generally is not considered as deprived, that there are pockets of deprivation with increased needs, potentially adding to Members workload serving the Wards affected. However, this would be more effectively addressed at Phase 2 of the Review.

Recommendation:

Taking into account all relevant data and analysis we believe Blaby District Council requires a minimum Council size of 36 to effectively operate and represent the electorate. This would be a reduction in current numbers by 3.