![Oxfordshire County Council logo] **Oxfordshire County Council**

Electoral Review of Oxfordshire County Council 2022

Council Size submission

13 December 2022

About this document

1. This document is submitted as evidence from Oxfordshire County Council to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) as part of the electoral review currently taking place. This is the Authority's submission on Council size.

2. This document has been prepared and collated by Officers using a range of information available, for consideration by Elected Members of the Council

3. At present, Oxfordshire County Council is served by 63 Councillors, representing 61 Divisions. All but two are single-Member Divisions, and the remaining two are two-Member Divisions.

4. It should be noted that the Submission should be considered in its entirety, rather than as a series of separate sections.

Introduction

5. The most recent electoral review of Oxfordshire County Council was held in 2012. Due to residential development and the growth of the local population, there are electoral imbalances between Divisions.

6. As a result, this current Review is being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to resolve the imbalances and provide greater electoral equality.

7. The initial stage of an Electoral Review is to identify and confirm the preferred Council Size. This is the number of elected Councillors who will serve on the Council and should be the number required to deliver effective and convenient local government (the number of members to enable the Council and individual Councillors to perform most effectively).

8. The final size of the Council will determine the average number of electors per Councillor, and this is then used to determine Division patterns. As such, it is important that the figure agreed is correct and reflects the needs of the authority and of the community, although it should be noted that the LGBCE may amend the agreed figure if necessary, in order to allow for a better representation of electors and as a result of consultation.

9. Within the review process, the LGBCE do not have an initial view on whether there should be an increase, decrease or no change in the size of the Council. However, all submissions must be evidence-led and justifiable.

Guidance on calculating Council Size

10. The LGBCE has provided guidance that highlights the areas that should be considered when developing a proposal for Council Size; these are considered in detail in the pages that follow:
    a. The governance arrangements of the Council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities.
    b. The Council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the Council's responsibilities to outside bodies.
    c. The representational role of Councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the Council on local partner organisations.

Local electorate

11. The number of registered local government electors, as of 1 December 2022, was 521,890. It is projected to increase to around 580,747 by the year 2029. That growth will not be evenly spread, but would lead to greater electoral inequality without this review. The table below provides the current (2022) and projected (2029) electorates by division, assuming no changes in electoral boundaries or arrangements. The expectation, through this review led by the LGBCE, is that all divisions will have a variance of less than 10%.

Name of Division	Number of Councillors	2022 Electorate	Variance 2022	2029 Electorate	Variance 2029
Abingdon East	1	7,450	-10%	7,468	-19%
Abingdon North	1	8,844	7%	8,844	-4%
Abingdon South	1	8,587	4%	8,598	-7%
Banbury Calthorpe	1	7,684	-7%	8,716	-5%
Banbury Grimsbury & Castle	1	8,706	5%	8,879	-4%
Banbury Hardwick	1	9,005	9%	9,005	-2%
Banbury Ruscote	1	7,858	-5%	7,858	-15%
Barton, Sandhills and Risinghurst	1	7,160	-14%	7,817	-15%
Benson and Cholsey	1	9,461	14%	10,662	16%
Berinsfield and Garsington	1	8,320	0%	11,104	20%
Bicester North	1	7,687	-7%	8,168	-11%
Bicester Town	1	6,976	-16%	8,438	-8%
Bicester West	1	8,735	5%	8,735	-5%
Bloxham & Easington	1	7,979	-4%	8,201	-11%
Burford and Carterton North	1	7,738	-7%	8,888	-4%
Carterton South and West	1	8,619	4%	8,993	-2%
Chalgrove and Watlington	1	9,329	13%	10,543	14%
Charlbury and Wychwood	1	8,182	-1%	8,195	-11%
Chipping Norton	1	8,789	6%	9,672	5%
Churchill and Lye Valley	1	7,765	-6%	8,502	-8%

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Name of Division	Number of Councillors	2022 Electorate	Variance 2022	2029 Electorate	Variance 2029
Cowley	1	8,330	1%	9,121	-1%
Deddington	1	9,714	17%	9,714	5%
Didcot East and Hagbourne	1	7,666	-7%	7,818	-15%
Didcot Ladygrove	1	6,192	-25%	6,750	-27%
Didcot West	1	11,509	39%	12,223	33%
Eynsham	1	8,680	5%	10,670	16%
Faringdon	1	7,863	-5%	8,504	-8%
Goring	1	8,925	8%	9,194	0%
Grove and Wantage	2	16,731	1%	20,612	12%
Hanborough and Minster Lovell	1	9,219	11%	10,371	13%
Headington and Quarry	1	8,077	-2%	9,254	0%
Hendreds and Harwell	1	10,239	24%	13,518	47%
Henley-on-Thames	1	9,504	15%	9,769	6%
Iffley Fields and St. Mary`s	1	7,136	-14%	7,479	-19%
Isis	1	6,382	-23%	7,679	-17%
Jericho and Osney	1	7,167	-13%	7,473	-19%
Kennington and Radley	1	8,448	2%	10,152	10%
Kidlington South	1	7,565	-9%	13,420	46%
Kingston and Cumnor	1	10,604	28%	11,277	22%
Kirtlington & Kidlington North	1	8,994	9%	8,994	-2%
Leys	1	8,272	0%	9,110	-1%
Marston and Northway	1	6,891	-17%	7,830	-15%
North Hinksey	1	8,139	-2%	8,264	-10%
Otmoor	1	9,012	9%	10,828	17%
Ploughley	1	8,041	-3%	9,432	2%
Rose Hill and Littlemore	1	7,823	-6%	8,522	-8%
Shrivenham	1	8,860	7%	9,471	3%
Sonning Common	1	8,173	-1%	8,738	-5%
St. Clement`s and Cowley Marsh	1	5,868	-29%	6,732	-27%
St. Margaret`s	1	6,988	-16%	7,599	-18%
Sutton Courtenay and Marcham	1	9,157	11%	10,895	18%
Thame and Chinnor	2	17,619	6%	18,102	-2%
University Parks	1	4,267	-48%	8,023	-13%
Wallingford	1	8,486	2%	11,285	22%
Wheatley	1	7,529	-9%	8,669	-6%
Witney North and East	1	8,677	5%	9,318	1%
Witney South and Central	1	8,588	4%	8,691	-6%
Witney West and Bampton	1	10,409	26%	10,865	18%
Wolvercote and Summertown	1	7,668	-7%	8,887	-4%
Woodstock	1	8,404	1%	9,008	-2%
Wroxton & Hook Norton	1	9,200	11%	9,200	0%
Overall	**63**	**521,890**		**580,747**	

Oxfordshire County Council

Council Vision and Priorities

12. The Council has a clear vision: Working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. It is clear that the Council must work with its partners, businesses, districts, and urban and rural communities to achieve this vision.

13. The Council has nine cross-cutting strategic priorities setting out the areas of focus:
    a. Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.
    b. Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.
    c. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.
    d. Support carers and the social care system.
    e. Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network.
    f. Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces.
    g. Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.
    h. Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy.
    i. Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

Managing the business of the Council

14. Oxfordshire County Council has adopted the 'Leader and Cabinet' model of local governance. At present, a joint administration of three political parties (two political groups) lead the Council and form the Cabinet. The model comprises:
    a. Full Council of 63 Members, who approve and adopt the budget and key policies within which Cabinet decisions are taken. Council appoints members of Committees and holds them and the Cabinet to account for the decisions they take.
    b. Cabinet comprises 10 Members. All key decisions at Oxfordshire County Council are made by Members of the Cabinet. They:
        i. Recommend budget and policy framework to the Council
        ii. Lead the Council
        iii. Make all the key decisions
        iv. Commission policy reviews from Scrutiny Committees
    c. Committees make non-Cabinet decisions, and cover specific functions not dealt with by the Cabinet (such as audit, organisational matters, planning, pension fund arrangements and standards). They make decisions delegated to them by the Council.
    d. Cabinet Advisory Groups examine topics selected by Cabinet which align to corporate Council priorities. They enable back bench Members to be more closely involved with issues of greatest importance to the Council.
    e. Scrutiny is an important function of the Council, and is separate from the Cabinet key decision makers. Scrutiny Committees:
        i. Review issues before decisions are made
        ii. Call-in decisions after they are made
        iii. Carry out policy development work for the Cabinet
        iv. Commission their own scrutiny reviews
    f. Councillors' overriding duty is to the whole community, but they are democratically accountable to all the residents of their Division. Their role is to

represent the residents of their Division, share in the policy and budgetary decisions of the Full Council, suggest policy improvements, and scrutinise the Cabinet's policy proposals and their implementation.

    g. In addition, Members also sit on Joint Committees (working in partnership with other public sector organisations), Strategic Partnerships and External Bodies, representing the interests of the County Council.

Member allowances

15. During the financial year 2021/22, the Basic Allowance paid to each Member was £11,013 and the total sum of allowances paid to County Councillors £1,005,141 (including subsistence and expenses). With effect from April 2022, each Member receives a Basic Allowance of £12,000, with a projected total cost for allowances for this financial year 2022/23 of £1,102,350 (excluding subsistence and expenses and subject to cost-of-living increases.) Those with a Special Responsibility receive an additional sum to reflect their additional responsibility. Members can have more than one such Special Responsibility, but payment for these roles is capped at a maximum of two. Members may also claim for mileage and expenses, and provision is made for caring responsibilities.

Roles and responsibilities of Councillors

Full Council

16. The Council currently has 63 Councillors.

17. All Councillors are Members of Full Council, which meets seven times per year. The biggest decisions, such as the acceptance of policies and the budget, are reserved for Full Council.

Cabinet

18. Oxfordshire County Council is currently led by a joint administration. As a result, the Cabinet includes Members from three political parties, bringing a breadth of experience. The Cabinet comprises 10 Members.

19. Key decisions are usually made by Cabinet Members, meeting either jointly as the Cabinet or as individual Cabinet Members, taking delegated decisions within their own responsibilities. Cabinet meetings are held once a month and are attended by all Cabinet Members. The Cabinet is also responsible for preparing the budget and policies to propose to the Full Council. Officers are also able to take key decisions acting under delegated powers.

20. The current Cabinet Member's portfolios are set out in the Constitution.

Delegations to Officers

21. The Council has a comprehensive Scheme of Delegation to Officers (as set out in the Constitution) which clearly sets out where the responsibility and extent of delegation lies.

22. These delegations to officers have helped to reduce the burden on Members.

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Regulatory Committees

23. Under the terms of the Constitution, a number of regulatory and other Committees have been established. These have delegated authority to carry out and/or oversee specific duties and functions of the Council. The table below gives an overview of these Committees.

Committee	Number of Members	Meetings/year
Audit & Governance Committee	9	6
Pension Fund Committee	5	4
Planning & Regulation Committee	12	8

Cabinet Advisory Groups

24. Oxfordshire County Council uses Cabinet Advisory Groups as necessary, which examine topics selected by Cabinet which align to corporate Council priorities. They enable back bench Members to be more closely involved with issues of greatest importance to the Council. Cabinet have recently agreed to a recommendation for a cross-party Cabinet Advisory Group to be convened, which will oversee the development of the options and business cases for the city centre accommodation review.

Other Committees

25. Committees cover specific functions. They make decisions delegated to them by the Council. Committees are made up of Councillors (including Cabinet Members). These include:
    a. Remuneration Committee
    b. Remuneration (Appointments) Sub-Committee
    c. Charlotte Coxe Memorial Trust Committee

Joint Committees

26. Oxfordshire County Council is represented on a number of Joint Committees, alongside other public sector bodies operating in the area. This approach allows greater collaborative working between organisations and a more efficient and effective use of public resources to benefit local communities and deliver services. These include:
    a. Adults with Care and Supports Needs Joint Management Group
    b. Better Care Fund Joint Management Group
    c. Health Improvement Partnership Board
    d. Horton Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee
    e. Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board
    f. Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee
    g. Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire Joint Health Scrutiny Committee
    h. Thames Valley Fire Control Joint Committee
    i. Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel
    j. Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel Complaints Sub-Committee

Strategic Partnerships

27. Oxfordshire County Council has two high-level strategic partnerships to oversee key county-wide priority functions. These include:
    a. Joint Management Group for Adults
    b. Future Oxfordshire Partnership (previously known as Oxfordshire Growth Board)
    c. Oxfordshire Waste Partnership Joint Committee (meeting with the Oxfordshire Environment Partnership)

Scrutiny Committees

28. The Scrutiny Committees provide advice and challenge to the Cabinet and may review its decisions.

Scrutiny Committee	Number of Members	Meetings/year
People Overview & Scrutiny Committee	9	4
Performance & Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee	9	4
Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee	9	4

Cross-Party Working Groups and Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups

29. The Council also appoints Members to Cross-Party Working Groups in relation to specific subject areas of importance to Council overall. These include the:
    a. Constitution Working Group (November 2021 onwards)
    b. Transport Working Group (February 2022 to May 2022)
    c. Carbon Reduction Targets Working Group (March 2022 to April 2022)
    d. Home to School Transport Working Group (June 2022 onwards)
    e. Democratic Processes Working Group (due to commence in February 2023)

Locality meetings

30. Oxfordshire has been split into nine locality areas with an average of seven Councillors. They allow a two-way conversation between Councillors and officers about plans, issues and challenges within a given locality.

Summary of appointments

31. In total, during the municipal year 2021-22 there were 1,401 attendances at formal meetings. This is in addition to many informal and ad hoc meetings and briefings. This equates to an average of over 22 per Councillor. Most meetings are open for Members to attend as observers, and many Councillors do take advantage of this right to ensure they keep up-to-date with matters of interest to their communities. In addition, there are further special meetings convened as required.

Cancellations

32. Over the past 18 months, a number of meetings have been postponed, cancelled or moved to virtual online events due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some discussion forums have remained accessible online, allowing a greater level of attendance by Members and the public, whilst statutory meetings have had to revert to in-person attendances to comply with the law. The number of meetings cancelled for reasons other than COVID-19 is small.

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Attendance of Members

33. In addition to looking at the extent to which cancellations have taken place, it is also important to look at the levels of attendance in order to gain an appreciation of how the Council currently functions. During 2021/22, Councillors attended an average of 92% of the meetings they were expected to. Given the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a high attendance rate.

Outside Bodies

34. The Council nominates Members to external bodies to represent the authority and local people to a range of different groups. These all meet 'as required', but the commitment of being a member of the external body includes preparing for and attending meetings, representing the views of the authority and its residents to the body, and feeding information back to the authority. Details here – www.mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/mgListOutsideBodies.aspx?bcr=1

Other responsibilities

35. In addition to attending meetings, Councillors play a key role as advocates and representatives of their local communities. Outside of the COVID-19 pandemic era, many hosted meetings and events for their residents. They attend local community events, representing the Council to residents and engaging with residents to identify matters of concern to them. They also receive letters, emails and telephone calls from local residents seeking information, advice and support in their interactions with both the Council and broader democratic and governmental processes, as well as communicating with residents through social media.

36. At present, 36 of the 63 Members also serve as District Councillors on one of the five Districts in the County, and some also serve as Parish or Town Councillors in their local community. Regardless of these additional responsibilities, many County Councillors attend local community events within their areas to serve local people and understand the issues they face.

37. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council preside at full Council meetings and have an important civic role in representing the Council at a range of events and functions across Oxfordshire. They have a close relationship with community organisations and charities. They work alongside the Lord Lieutenant and High Sheriff in undertaking ceremonial duties.

38. Councillors were invited to complete a short form to give a clearer understanding of their current workloads and other commitments. Of 63 Councillors, 16 responded (25%). Not all questions were relevant to all Councillors, so figures below are based on the actual responses received. Councillors who did respond may differ from those that did not, so these may be overestimates.

    a. Due to the varying nature of their roles and responsibilities, time in service, and other commitments, the amount of time spent on County Council duties varies considerably. For example, a Councillor in opposition or a back bench

Councillor without additional responsibilities will have fewer meetings and formal engagements than Group Leaders or Chairs of Committees.

b. The amount of time spent preparing for meetings varies, depending on the type of meeting and the level of interaction required with colleagues, members of the public, or other stakeholders in advance of the meeting. For individual Councillors, the amount of time preparing for formal meetings also depends on the number of meetings they are expected to attend. In a typical month, respondents told us the amount of preparation time varied but averaged 36 hours (range between 13 and 80 hours). In addition, follow-up actions and activities are required for many. Councillors also advised that their role of being a community representative extends into many areas of their life, making assessments of time commitment very difficult.

c. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected workloads in different ways. Some Councillors reported the number of formal meetings decreased, and travel time decreased due to the use of digital meeting technologies. Others reported that caseloads have increased owing to more people working from home and noticing issues in the local community more readily.

d. Councillors represent communities throughout the county. As such, many travel considerable distances to attend Council meetings and events, as well as attending activities in their own Division.

e. County Councillors spend considerable amounts of time in other meetings and engaging in other business of the Council. Whilst project meetings, discussions with Officers, briefings and informal meetings do not apply to all Councillors, for those for whom it does, it takes around 20 hours per month. For specific projects, or for Councillors with specific responsibilities, this can be considerably longer and may involve extended engagements, and multiple briefings and discussions.

f. The amount of time required for external appointments, where the Councillor represents Oxfordshire County Council to another body, also varies considerably. However, many Councillors represent the County Council in a number of ways, including:
    i. working with active travel groups
    ii. attending Parish Council meetings
    iii. attending resident associations and neighbourhood forums
    iv. being a governor to local primary schools
    v. working with other public sector organisations on project delivery
    vi. attending community events
    vii. working with rail and other transport service providers
    viii. working with the military as a representative
    ix. working on local social housing committees
    x. attending Fostering and Adoption Panel meetings
    xi. supporting local business, charities and sporting clubs

xii. attending boards and committee meetings

xiii. supporting community initiatives such as food banks and community kitchens

xiv. working with partner organisations on health and wellbeing, and community cohesion projects

xv. supporting community groups, environmental projects and children's centres

g. Over half of Oxfordshire County Councillors are also District Councillors, and many are also Parish or Town Councillors. Whilst there is an overlap in their representative role, County Councillors with these additional roles report considerable additional time due to their formal duties. This includes meetings, preparation, and casework.

h. Some County Councillors also have roles within their political groups, and most are members of a political party. Whilst not directly part of their duties as a Councillor, the political system is an important structure within their work.

i. Most County Council Divisions are served by several Parish Councils, with one served by over 20 parishes, and County Councillors often attend most Parish Council meetings in their area where possible. Many also provide written reports to their Parish Councils with an update on activities that may affect them. This leads some to attend many meetings per month, often several each week, with each taking an evening for the meeting and preparation time.

j. The volume of case work (representing and responding to the needs and concerns of local residents) also varies considerably between Councillors and over periods of time. Whilst one or two hours per day is typical, this can easily extend to several hours for complex or pressing concerns. One Councillor advised that they are on call every day of the week for up to 18 hours per day, and it is never possible to predict when they will be called upon for help by residents, local businesses or other Councillors; another Member reported that the case work they do is the equivalent of a full-time job now they have retired from paid employment, taking 35+ hours per week. Councillors reported receiving emails, phone calls and in-person conversations from residents asking for support, and spend time liaising with officers and other organisations to seek resolution. Some Councillors also hold surgeries or walk through their local area on a regular basis.

k. In addition to their formal duties and casework, Councillors undertake training to help make them as effective as possible in their roles. This includes general training and support, as well as specialised training.

l. Around two-thirds of responding Councillors also work (either part-time or full-time). Some Councillors have changed their working practices to accommodate their role as a County Councillor, noting that daytime meetings

for the Council make employment challenging; others noted that their businesses have suffered due to the role of County Councillor taking considerable time away from it. Many respondents reported that their role as a County Councillor has led to a reduction in income from self-employment, due to the considerable requirements of the role.

m. Around one-quarter of responding Councillors also have caring responsibilities, either of children or of their parents or older relatives. Those with caring responsibilities reported on the need to juggle their various roles to accommodate Council business alongside family life.

n. One Councillor summed up: "County Council work fills the time allocated to it. It might be relatively easy to take a back seat, but that would make the role rather pointless and be unfair to residents."

o. The timing and location of meetings has an impact on how effective Councillors can be, owing to travel commitments and overlap of other responsibilities.

39. Whilst an increase in the number of electors alone will not increase the number of meetings, it could increase the caseload work. Any reduction in the number of Councillors would need to be accompanied by changes to the Council's governance arrangements to reduce the meeting requirements (either by reducing the number of meetings, or reducing the number of Councillors attending). However, in the absence of any such planned changes, a reduction in the size of Council would result in an increase in the number of meetings individuals are expected to attend. This may result in some existing Councillors being unable to continue in their current roles and may deter new candidates from standing for election in future.

40. In addition, the expected growth of the electorate indicates that, without other changes, the number of electors each Councillor would represent would increase considerably. This, similar to an actual reduction in the number of Councillors, may preclude Councillors from being able to carry out their duties effectively, to the detriment of local people.

Comparison to other authorities

41. The LGBCE offer a chart showing the Council size of the authorities in the CIPFA nearest neighbours model. Using publicly available information, the table below shows comparisons in the number of electors per Councillor (using 2021 electorate figures and current number of Councillors). Given demographic and other local differences between areas, there is no expectation that every County Council should have the same ratio of electors to Councillors.

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Authority *	Local government electorate**	Cllrs	Electors per Councillor	Last LGBCE review	Deprivation †	Area ‡	Electors per square mile
Oxfordshire	**516,947**	**63**	**8,206**	**2012; ongoing**	**0.250 [3]**	**1,006**	**514**
Cambridgeshire	487,632	61	7,995	2016	1.070 [7]	1,310	372
Gloucestershire	488,097	53	9,209	2012	3.220 [12]	1,220	400
Warwickshire	443,888	57	7,778	2015	1.770 [8]	763	582
West Sussex	659,418	70	9,420	2016	0.990 [5]	769	858
Hampshire	1,053,198	78	13,503	2016	0.840 [4]	1,455	724
Hertfordshire	870,017	78	11,154	2015	0.140 [2]	634	1372
Essex	1,116,590	75	14,888	2004	3.440 [13]	1,420	786
Worcestershire	455,559	57	7,992	2004	4.950 [14]	672	678
Surrey	874,125	81	10,792	2012	<.100 [1]	642	1362
Leicestershire	539,750	55	9,814	2016	1.010 [6]	832	649
Suffolk	569,296	75	7,591	2021 (reduces Members to 70 at next election)	4.990 [15]	1,468	388
Somerset	433,855	55	7,888	2012	2.750 [10]	1,610	269
North Yorkshire	480,120	90	5,335	2004	2.950 [11]	3,341	144
Kent	1,146,341	81	14,152	2016	5.650 [16]	1,443	794
Staffordshire	663,673	62	10,704	2012	2.080 [9]	1,048	633

* Based on CIPFA nearest neighbours model as reported by LGA Inform (https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/lga-research-cohesion-and-integration?mod-area=E10000025)

** Electorate as of 1 December 2021 register publication, as published by the Office for National Statistics.

† Proportion of most deprived lower super output areas (LSOA) in 2015; square brackets indicates the rank in the CIPFA group, with [1] the lowest and least deprived. Data from LG Inform.

‡ Area (square miles) as reported by https://populationdata.org.uk/english-counties-by-population-and-area/

Cells highlighted RED have an electorate per Councillor ratio greater than Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire County Council

42. Using the December 2022 electorate (the most up-to-date figure available), Oxfordshire County Council currently has 8,284 electors per Councillor; if it retains 63 Councillors the electorate ratio will be 9,075 in six years' time.

Council Size considerations

43. Through discussions at the Cross-Party Member Working Group, County Councillors have shared their views on the future size of Oxfordshire County Council. It is noted that any increase in the total number of Councillors will lead to an increase in financial cost to the authority, due to allowances and on-costs in terms of additional officer support, but it is understood that there is a cost associated with effective democracy and proper representation.

44. At the 2005 County Council elections, there were 74 elected County Councillors. A subsequent review in 2012 reduced this to 63, the current figure. Since that review, the county experienced sustained electoral growth.

45. The electorate forecast to 2029 indicates further substantial growth. Members of Council feel that any further reduction in their number would lead to an untenable situation with too many electors being represented by each Councillor. This would lead to a reduction in the level of service a Councillor can provide.

46. County Councillors play an important role as leaders and representatives of their communities. They attend Parish and Town Council meetings, to ensure the views of local people are heard and understood. They attend local and community events in their electoral Divisions to represent the Council to local people. They play a key role in listening to the needs, issues and ideas of communities and relaying these through both the decision-making processes and to Officers of the Council. They support local people both collectively, such as through making changes to services, and individually through case work. Many of these roles take place privately, without the general public being aware of the work involved.

47. It is important for Oxfordshire County Councillors to be able to represent local people effectively. The county has a number of larger towns, with their own distinct styles, communities and local issues, as well as a large number of smaller parishes, and the issues experienced in urban and rural areas differ.

48. Oxfordshire County Councillors are expected to be available for their constituents, and to appropriately represent their needs.

49. Given the important roles County Councillors fulfil, it is vital that they can continue to represent local communities. The only way to do that is by ensuring the number of electors per Councillor does not rise excessively. Given the ongoing significant growth in the electorate, the only way to achieve that is through an increase in the number of Councillors on Oxfordshire County Council.

Oxfordshire County Council

50. The table below outlines the impact of different Council Sizes on the number of Electors per Councillor, compared to the current figure (in December 2022, with 63 Councillors) of 8,284.

Electorate, 2029	Council Size	Electors per councillor
580,747	61	9520
580,747	62	9367
580,747	63	9218
580,747	64	9074
580,747	65	8935
580,747	66	8799
580,747	67	8668
580,747	68	8540
580,747	69	8417
580,747	70	8296
580,747	71	8180
580,747	72	8066
580,747	73	7955

Council Size Submission

(1) Taking into account the details of this report, which outline the workload of Oxfordshire Council Councillors in terms of both meetings and casework, the current financial climate, future methods of working, changes in the structure and service delivery of the authority over recent years, and recognising the changing role of Councillors moving forwards, the Council has discussed the following and there is #cross-party agreement# to this being the formal Council Size submission on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council to the LGBCE as part of the current Review.

(2) Oxfordshire County Council recognise that all current Divisions will be reviewed and are likely to change in the next stage of the Review, and a separate submission will be made to the LGBCE to support that process.

(3) Oxfordshire County Council submit that the future Council size for this authority should be **69**.

(4) In addition, Oxfordshire County Council requests that the future Division arrangements comprise solely single Member Divisions as far as possible.

Supplementary information – 6 January 2023

1   Electorate forecast methodology

The number of planned residential dwellings for each expected development site (from 2022 to 2029) has been provided by Planning Services at each District Council and collated by County officers. The forecasts for Oxford City use a modified methodology due to the large student population.

The desirability of Oxfordshire as a place to live and as a location for employers means that development sites are highly likely to be completed irrespective of the economic climate. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the population will grow as indicated in the Council submission.

2   Review process

A cross-party working group was established to provide political input into the review process. A technical officer group has been supporting the working group with officers from the five District Councils working alongside officers from the County Council.

The members of the working group were mindful of financial pressures and recognised that any increase in the total number of councillors would lead to higher costs for allowances and officer support. However, the anticipated increase in dwellings will result in higher revenue from Council Tax.

3   Representing local communities

County Councillors provide a vital role in representing their local communities and therefore it is important that the number of electors they represent does not rise excessively. With significant growth in the electorate, the only way this can be achieved is through an increase in the number of elected members on the Council.

Oxfordshire has a large city along with a number of market towns and a relatively sparsely populated rural area. Individual caseloads reflect the nature of each councillor's division: the needs of inner city Oxford are not the same as Henley-on-Thames which in turn are very different to a rural division with 20 parish councils.

4   Climate change action

The Council's priority for a greener more climate friendly Oxfordshire puts county councillors in the frontline as evidenced by media coverage and public

reaction to the introduction of low traffic neighbourhoods, 20mph speed limits and proposals for traffic filters.

The role of the Council extends well beyond its own operations and now includes influencing local people in making choices around climate change. Councillors and the decision-making process have arguably never had such a high public profile.

5   Growing caseload for individual members

The volume and complexity of the casework for councillors has grown over the last 10 years. The workload of individual county councillors has historically been dominated by highway-related issues, particularly the condition of roads. That is not a surprise as this affects everyone to a greater or lesser degree. Roads continue to be a big issue but the population and employment growth across Oxfordshire means that members are having to deal with much more than road condition. This includes the infrastructure to support new development: new routes, upgrading or replacing major road junctions, developing more 'climate friendly' ways of travelling and determining the location of community facilities like new schools.

The caseload of members has grown to reflect other areas of public concern which are related to pressures on local government funding. This includes Special Educational Needs (SEND) assessments with residents approaching their local county councillor for support with their applications. The volume of applicants together with limited resources means that councillors often become involved as advocates for people living in their divisions. For example, the county councillor for Henley-on-Thames has seen his casework expand significantly as a result of parents approaching him on SEND assessments for their children. This upsurge in demand is not short-term as financial constraints mean that it is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Flooding and the fear of flooding has become a much bigger issue over the last 10 years. Councillors are often the focal point for the public and can use the knowledge gained from their local community to help public agencies and utility companies, including the Environment Agency and Thames Water, tackle incidents. The role of the councillor not only includes responding when flooding incidents happen but also working with agencies afterwards to consider lessons learnt and what steps can be taken to prevent future flooding.

6   Changing governance arrangements

A motion was passed by full Council on 7 October 2022 to consider a potential change of governance from cabinet and leader to a committee system. This is being taken forward through a cross-party working group in 2023. If adopted, a committee structure will involve a wider number of members becoming involved in decision-making at the Council.

7   Reinvigorating Overview and Scrutiny
The Council is taking steps to raise the profile of scrutiny and provide wider member engagement through overview and scrutiny committees and task and finish groups. Task and finish groups on a range of issues including transport, education, health and social care result in more involvement from members. A recent motion passed by full Council (13 December 2022) related to the potential introduction of an Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee alongside the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In recent years, the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel has been established and more recently the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire (BOB) Joint Health Scrutiny Committee, both with councillor representation from Oxfordshire County Council. Joint arrangements such as these with other public sector organisations are becoming more common in an effort to deliver value for money in the provision of public services.

8   Financial pressures
The last 10 years has seen much greater financial pressure on Council services with councillors become more involved in 'challenge' sessions alongside senior officers to explore new ways of working and finding innovative ways of doing more with less resources. Councillors have to defend decisions to spend money on one area whilst reducing expenditure in another area. Inevitably some sectors of the local community feel like they are not being listened to and this results in them contacting their local councillor. Public protests and petitions are now commonplace whereas in the past these were the exception rather than the norm.

In addition, cuts to local government funding over the past 10-15 years have impacted on service delivery. Where members of the public do not receive the service that they feel that they should receive, and in some cases are statutorily permitted to receive, they now revert to their councillor for information, guidance and support rather than engaging with officers as they would traditionally.

9   Covid impact
The Covid pandemic highlighted the role of members in identifying vulnerable members in their local communities, some of whom were not known to local authorities and health bodies such as GP surgeries. Councillors through their community links were able to help provide support and coordinate agencies in putting in place support packages.

The Covid period resulted in an upsurge in demand for a range of Council services, many unrelated to the response to the pandemic itself. Some services saw a three or four-fold increase in demand. Examples include Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests where demand grew to

such an extent that the local authorities could not meet demand and lengthy backlogs built up. Service users became frustrated and complained about the perceived lack of response. This often results in their local councillor becoming involved. Some of these backlogs have still not been fully addressed.

The increase in demand for services has continued following Covid as the members of the public have become more aware of their rights and inclined to make a much higher number of requests.

10   Individual member profile
Councillors have a much higher profile than previously as they are widely seen as the face of the Council. Senior officers more often fulfilled this role in the past and were commonly put forward as the Council spokesperson for particular issues. Controversial plans to change the way that services are delivered and the Council's growing community leadership role in areas such as climate change mean that councillors are the focus for the public including media coverage.

Councillors are more likely to be on the ground in their local communities and have become more 'hands on' in coordinating the delivery of services, sometimes brokering solutions between different agencies. With the constraints on funding councillors are increasingly forming local networks and hubs to ensure that action is taken to address particular concerns.

In 2022-23, each councillor has £15,000 through the 'Councillor Priority Fund' to provide grants to community organisations. This new initiative is bringing councillors much closer to the communities that they serve with a resulting increase in their workload.

11   Council size
A range of options for Council Size were considered by the cross-party working group: from keeping the current number of members (63) to increasing the to 72 members. After a lengthy discussion, a cross-party consensus was reached by the members of the working group on a Council Size of 69. Members of the working group strongly support single-member Divisions and for an odd (rather than even) total number of councillors.

5 January 2023

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