

Solihull Green Group

Council Size Submission: Template

[Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council]

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How to Make a Submission

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

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

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

- Clarity on objectives
- A straightforward and evidence-led style
- An understanding of local place and communities
- An understanding of councillors' roles and responsibilities

About You

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

We are Solihull Green Group. We are 13 Councillors, representing the wards of Chelmsley Wood (3), Kingshurst & Fordbridge (2), Shirley South (2), Shirley West (3), and Smith's Wood (3). We are members of Solihull Green Party and the Green Party of England & Wales.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

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

N/A

The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 - 20 years. **The consideration of future governance arrangements and council size should be set in the wider local and national policy context.** The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

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

Solihull Council currently operates on a Cabinet model with 51 Councillors. However, this model may not be the most appropriate in the coming years, given the shifting politics. There are 3 groups on Solihull Council, with the Conservative Group being the largest (29), the Green Group being the largest opposition group (13), and the Liberal Democrats the smaller opposition group (6), with a further 3 Councillors in no group, sitting as Independent members. Whilst there are two Parliamentary constituencies in the borough (Solihull & Meriden), with both electing Conservative representatives at the last election, there is clearly an appetite for broader representation, with Solihull having in the past elected Liberal Democrat representatives.

At the last local elections in 2023, of the 48,889 electors that cast a vote, only 45% of them (22,067) voted for a Conservative candidate. The current model is one that is not serving the majority of residents' interests well. As such, a Committee model is likely to be the most appropriate going forward. This would allow for both greater democratic input, but also more representative deliberation and decision making. It would make political change less destabilising and allow for greater continuity, for these reasons it would also be advisable to retain the current electoral arrangement of voting in thirds, and not move to all-up elections.

As we are proposing increasing the number of Councillors to 57, with two new wards being created, the number of roles that are currently required would be adequately provided for, with future-proofing built in to the arrangements.

In terms of capacity issues, there are clearly greater pressures on the time of Councillors, with the majority of meetings having at least one absence or substitute member in attendance. This is picked up in the Council's own submission with the majority of Councillors (88%) saying they both spend more time on Council business than they expected and the amount of time they spend has increased in recent years. To counteract that impact, and to make change to a committee system viable it is essential to increase the number of Councillors.

Local Authority Profile

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

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

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

Brief Outline of area:

Solihull had a population of 216,700 in 2021 according to the Office of National Statistics.¹ Solihull was described in the Council’s 2018/19 accounts as “the most polarised authority” due to its concentration of Lower Super Output areas in both the top and bottom quintiles in the Index of Multiple Deprivation.² The proportions of LSOAs in each quintile has changed little in that period. There is significant inequality with regards to life expectancy between the top and bottom deciles of deprivation, with women in the least deprived areas expecting to live 10 years longer than women in the most deprived areas (79.4-89.4 years), with the gap for men being 12 years (72.9-85.0 years)³. These gaps are higher than the English averages.

¹ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157190/report.aspx?town=Solihull>

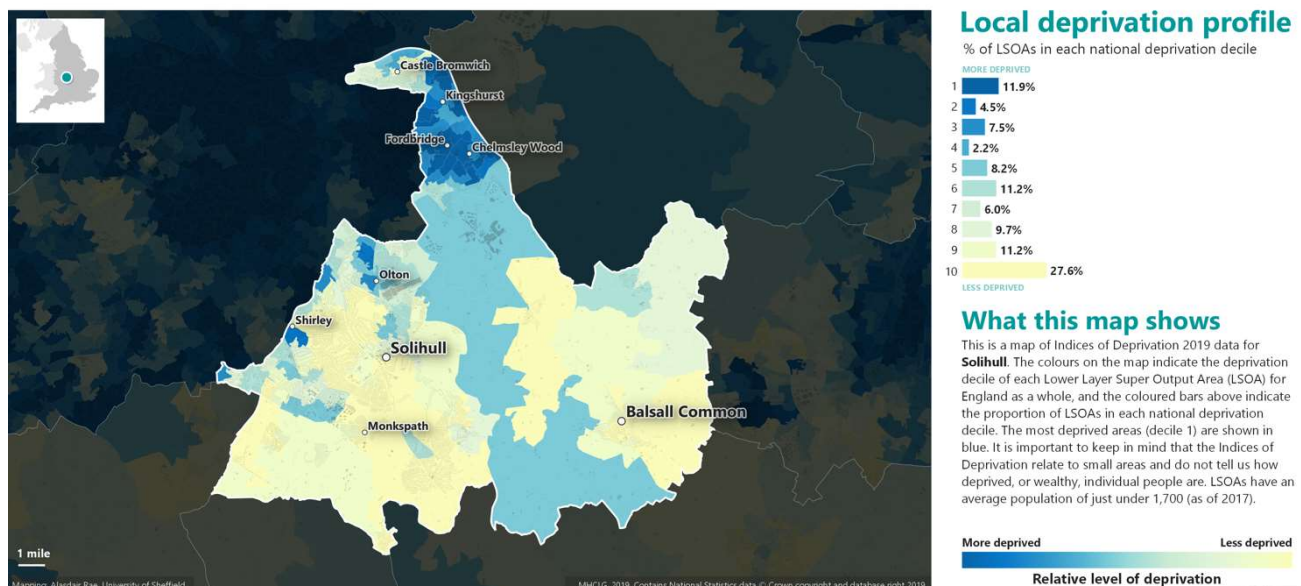
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https://www.solihull.gov.uk/sites/default/files/migrated/Portals_0_PerformanceAndSpending%252FAccounting-Statement-2018-19.pdf page 3

³ https://www.solihull.gov.uk/sites/default/files/migrated/InfoandIntelligence_The-Story-of-Solihull-2020.pdf page 10

English Indices of Deprivation 2019

SOLIHULL



The Council describes the borough in terms of 3 distinct localities of North, East and West. Most residents refer to the North/South divide more often, whilst residents in both North and East localities recognise the wealth held in “leafier” parts of the West. There is a commonly held belief that preference is given in favour of those areas in decision-making.

The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic population has grown in recent years. This has taken time to be demonstrated by representation on the Council. There are still a smaller proportion of BAME Councillors on the Council than there are on the Council itself.

Rural or Urban:

Solihull has a split of rural and urban wards, with some being mixed. The west and south of the borough are more rural and the north and east are more urban. Access to the greenbelt is not evenly distributed and plans for development will see development located mostly in the Blythe and Meriden wards, with knock-on impacts for Shirley from the Blythe plans.

Demographic pressures:

Most notable in terms of demographic trends is the ageing population of Solihull. 21.1% of Solihull residents are aged 65 or over.⁴ The average for Metropolitan Boroughs across the country is 17.76%. The median age of Solihull residents is 43 years old, 4 years older than the median for Metropolitan Boroughs.⁵ Election data consistently shows that engagement with elections rises as people get older, with the experience of Councillors mirroring that there is a higher incidence of casework from older demographics.⁶ Adding to increasing workloads is the nature and complexity of the casework, especially as it relates to Adult Social Care and Health Services. This kind of casework often requires greater sensitivity

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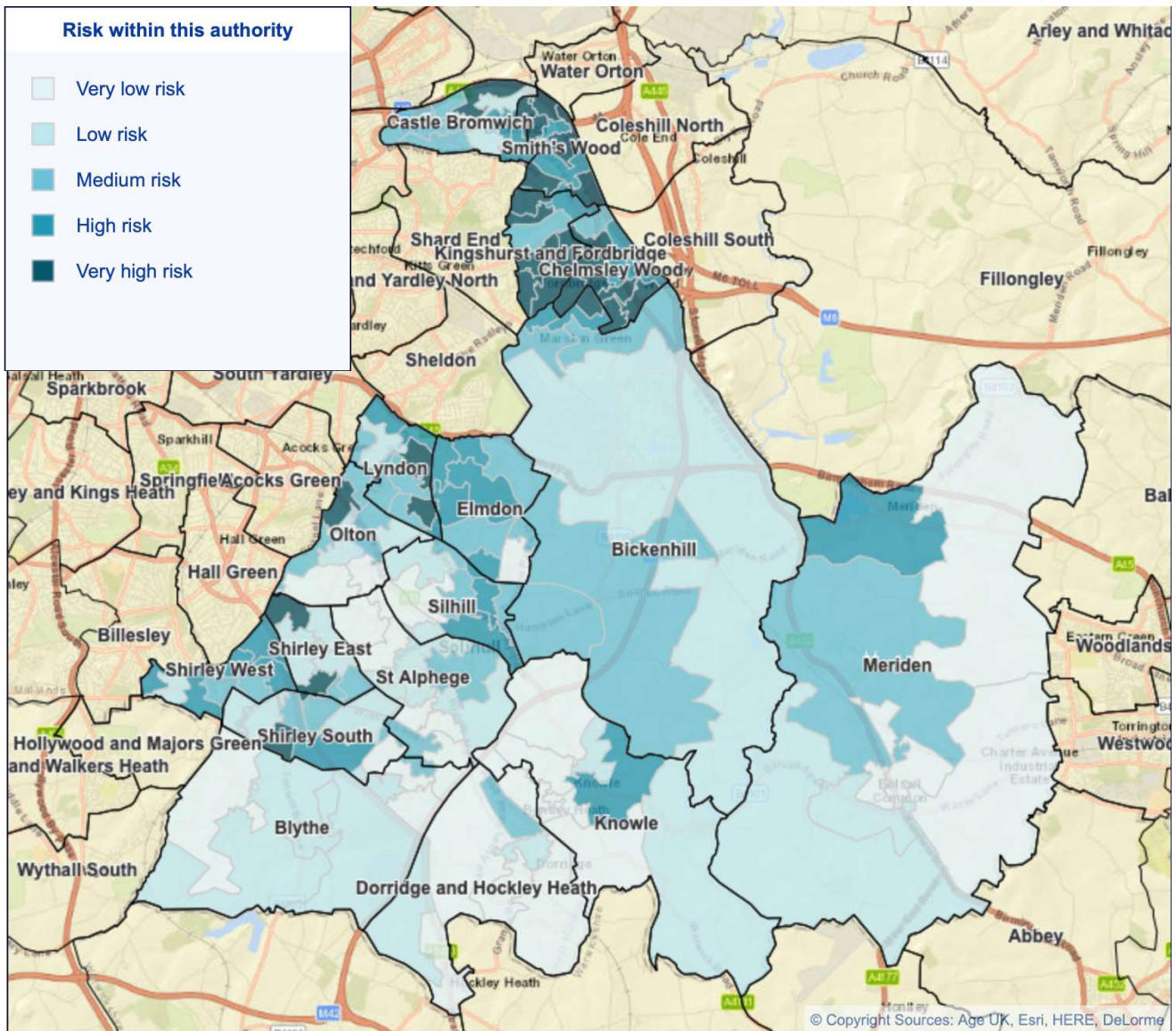
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationandhouseholdestimatesenglandandwales/census2021>

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationandhouseholdestimatesenglandandwales/census2021unroundeddata>

⁶ <https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/age-and-voting-behaviour-at-the-2019-general-election/>

and a greater time commitment, both due to the nature of the casework and the lack of services to meet their need. Some calls for assistance can also be attributed to loneliness, the risk of which is again unevenly distributed across the borough, as demonstrated in the map compiled by Age UK below.⁷



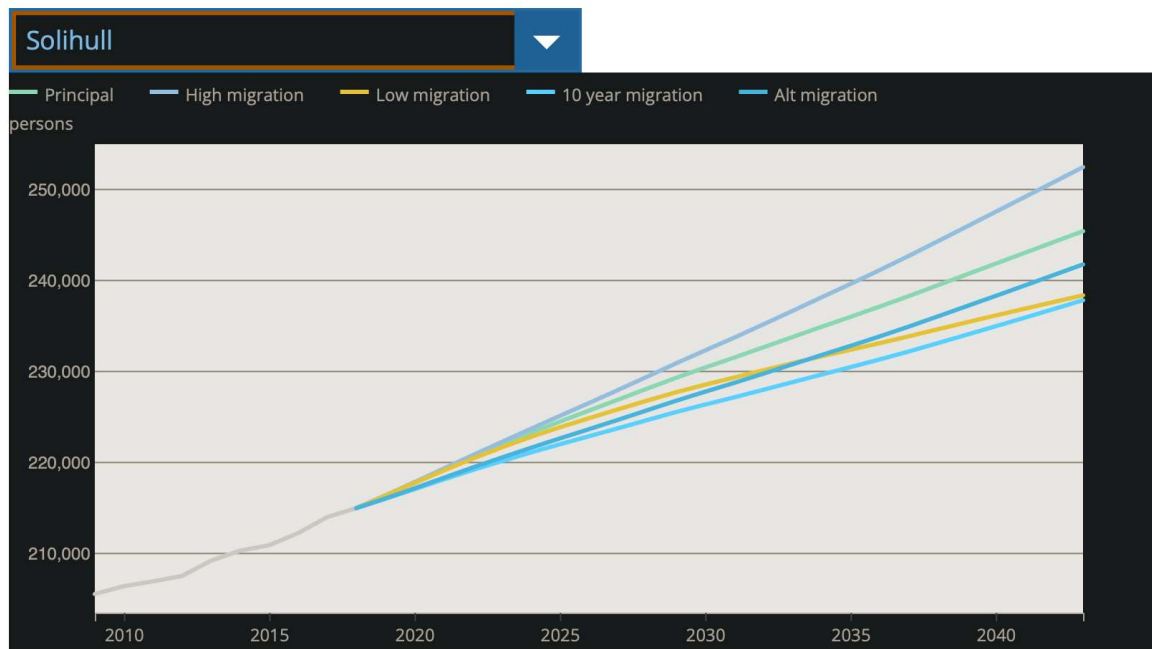
Another notable demographic change has already been mentioned, but will be expanded upon here, that of population growth. Solihull is expected to grow by 6.1% over a 10-year period, significantly over the average of 4.4% for all Metropolitan Boroughs (which itself is skewed by the high projected growth outliers of Coventry, Wakefield and Salford, which when excluded brings the average down to 3.86%).⁸ The lowest growth projections would see a population of over 230,000 people by 2035, which is within the timescale of this review.

⁷ <http://data.ageuk.org.uk/loneliness-maps/england-2016/solihull/>

⁸

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2018based#change-by-local-authority>

Figure 5: The variant population projections showing a range of future demographic scenarios by local authority, mid-2009 to mid-2043



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ONS projections can, and often are disputed. What is potentially a more reliable indicator of population growth, locally, is planned development. Solihull’s Local Plan Review has set out the expected levels of development over a 15-year period. The following section sets out the anticipated growth as detailed in the Council’s Local Plan.¹⁰

There were 90,937 households in Solihull by 2020, with a further 12,912 projected to be built by 2036, according to Solihull Council’s own Local Plan Submission. The guidelines are for 30% to be 1-2 bedrooms, 50% will be 3 bedrooms, and 20% will be 4 bedrooms or more. Assuming only a 75% occupancy of rooms, we’d see population increase of 31,956 by 2036 (4,357 from 1-2 bedrooms, assuming an average of 1.5 bedrooms, 14,526 from 3 bedrooms, 13,073 from over 4 bedrooms, assuming an average of 4.5 bedrooms). This is higher than the ONS projections, but likely to be a more accurate predictor of actual population change (given that housing is a significant limiting factor to population growth, and the high occupancy rates of properties in the borough). Solihull Council’s own housing stock amounted to 10,035 properties for the last return to government. Of these only 174

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2018based#change-by-local-authority>

¹⁰ <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/003-Draft-Submission-Plan-Incorporating-Post-Publication-Minor-Modifications-as-Tracked-Changes.pdf>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/local-authority-housing-statistics-data-returns-for-2021-to-2022>

were vacant, representing only 1.73% of the total. This demonstrates the demand for housing in the local area.

These factors all contribute towards a need to increase the number of Councillors on Solihull Council.

Council Size

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

Strategic Leadership

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

Topic		
<p>Governance Model</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<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> ➤ <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>As referenced previously, Solihull Council currently operates on a Cabinet model with 51 Councillors. However, this model may not be the most appropriate in the coming years, given the shifting politics. There are 3 groups on Solihull Council, with the Conservative Group being the largest (29), the Green Group being the largest opposition group (13), and the Liberal</p>

		<p>Democrats the smaller opposition group (6), with a further 3 Councillors in no group, sitting as Independent members. Whilst there are two Parliamentary constituencies in the borough (Solihull & Meriden), with both electing Conservative representatives at the last election, there is clearly an appetite for broader representation, with Solihull having in the past elected Liberal Democrat representatives.</p> <p>For these reasons there will likely be a need to move to a more representative Committee system in the coming years.</p>
Portfolios	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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>We do not propose a significant change in the number of portfolios, but the replacement of the 8 Portfolios with Committees would increase the number of internal meetings that Councillors were expected to attend. However, proportionally, this would only amount to an additional 5-10 meetings for each new Committee member. Assuming 6 members on each Committee, there would be a total of 63 meetings, which 6 additional Councillors would almost cover.</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>The only changes to the current arrangements for delegated powers would be to replace Delegation to Cabinet Members with Delegation to their equivalent Committees.</p>

Accountability

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

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	<p>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.</p>

<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>		<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>
<p>Analysis</p>		<p>Solihull Council currently operates on a minimum level of scrutiny membership, with some boards having to cover either too broad an area (e.g Economic Development & Managed Growth), or overlapping areas (e.g SEND children, which covers health and education, similarly Community Infrastructure Levy overlaps multiple scrutiny boards). These issues come about from there being at least one, but realistically two too few Scrutiny Boards. As each board meets, on average, 7 times per year, this would create the need for between 7-14 new meetings. With the equivalent of 9 members each, this amounts to 63-126 member attendances. As each Councillor averages around 29 meetings, this would equate to between 2-4 new Councillors required.</p>
<p>Statutory Function</p>		<p>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?</p>
<p>Planning</p>	<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>
<p>Analysis</p>		<p>No changes to the current arrangements are proposed, but there is an acknowledgement that the anticipated growth of almost 1,000 new dwellings per year will put significant pressure on an already stretched Planning Committee. There may come a need to separate major applications for the appropriate consideration of all necessary applications.</p>

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	No changes are proposed from the arrangement of a Licensing Committee, Sub-Committee and Act panel.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Audit Committee</u> • <u>Code of Conduct Hearing Panel</u> • <u>Governance Committee</u> • <u>HS2 Implementation Advisory Group</u> • <u>Remuneration Committee</u> • <u>TPO Panel</u> • <u>West Midlands Police and Crime Panel</u>
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
Key lines of explanation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council? ➤ How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders? ➤ What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?
Analysis		<p>Representation of opposition groups is very poor on the WMCA. Whilst the number of positions is a matter outside the Council's control, their distribution is.</p> <p>There are well over 60 different community organisations that positions are offered to Councillors, with many not being listed or acknowledged at Annual Council. Many of these positions sit vacant due to the unavailability of time for Councillors to make additional time commitments.</p>

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

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	Key lines of explanation	<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> ➤ <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> ➤ <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>
	Analysis	<p>Our Group members primarily engage with residents on a door-to-door basis. The main reason for this is that the age profile of residents means there are still quite high levels of digital exclusion, and the most complex and pressing needs are only accessible via these means.</p> <p>In previous years there were Ward meetings held with the Neighbourhood team. These were a popular forum for addressing the vast majority of low level issues picked up in casework. They have been replaced by Locality Meetings, which are a much broader forum that has been less popular with Councillors. It has made the issue of getting casework more time consuming for Councillors to resolve without the more discrete meetings. Many Councillors do not feel as comfortable sharing some more sensitive casework in a much more broadly attending setting.</p>

		<p>Whilst there are some of our Group who hold surgeries, the majority of engagement is conducted face-to-face on the doorstep. Each ward typically sends out 6 newsletters per year, not including campaign literature. Considering the typical number of over 5,000 households, the time requirements for adequate contact are extensive.</p> <p>There are no notable outreach mechanisms, with our group members often being asked to assist the Council when there is an acknowledgement of communities being “hard to reach”.</p> <p>In wards with Parish Councils there is an expectation for Councillors at the Borough level to either attend or at least give regular updates to the members. Some wards will have multiple Parish Councils, or there may be Town forums, or bodies associated with BID areas.</p> <p>Whilst some of our Group members are also Parish Councillors, there can often be an expectation for further engagement than time permits between bodies. This can lead to an increased sentiment of people’s removal from decision making processes.</p>
	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<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>
<p>Casework</p>	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The nature of casework determines how it is resolved. Historically, the majority of casework would be resolved by a single email or phone call, with any remainder being swept up at Neighbourhood Ward level meetings.</p> <p>Since the pandemic, Councillors were expected to log all casework via the Contact Centre. Typically, even low level casework (litter, dog-fouling, fly-tipping, graffiti, parking, trees) will require repeated follow-ups to resolve. As a result there has been an unwritten pressure for Councillors to resolve the issues themselves. This is most notable with litter picking and cleaning graffiti. Similarly, there have been instances where Councillors have replaced some of the more major functions of the Council, either in environmental services (removing tree stumps and planting trees) or Adult Social Care (especially since the pandemic, with community members having to meet the shortfall in any provision of care services).</p>

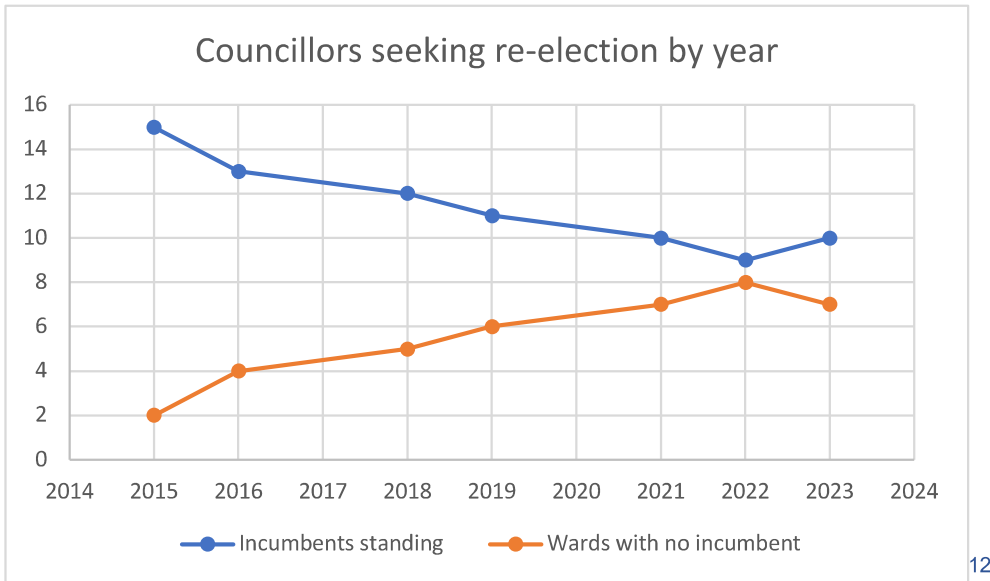
		<p>Aside from the allowance, most members feel that there is either very little, or inadequate support from the Council. This has been exacerbated since austerity was introduced, with the longest serving Councillors feeling this most strongly.</p> <p>Whatever benefits technology has delivered, it has not reduced workloads. If anything, it has increased them. The ease by which people can sign online petitions that contact local Councillors, or the expectations to engage across multiple forums (blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, email, WhatsApp, text) means that Councillors are more available to more people than ever before. Being more able to reach Councillors more quickly can also come with an increased expectation for how quickly Councillors should respond. There have been instances where people have criticised Councillors on social media for not responding within 30 minutes to an email. Whilst these are outliers, there is an expectation on public forums to respond promptly to residents. The volume of contacts is significantly higher by email than it ever was by phone or letter, for those Councillors who have been across the transition. Councillors can expect between 8-50 contacts per day. Whilst many of these will not be casework, they still require time to review and potentially reply. This is also evidenced by 45% of respondents to a Willis Towers Watson survey stating that technology has increased their workloads.¹¹</p> <p>There has been a gradual erosion of public services since austerity was introduced. The pressure and effort to resolve matters means that more work is done by Councillors, without going through the Council.</p>
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Other Issues

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

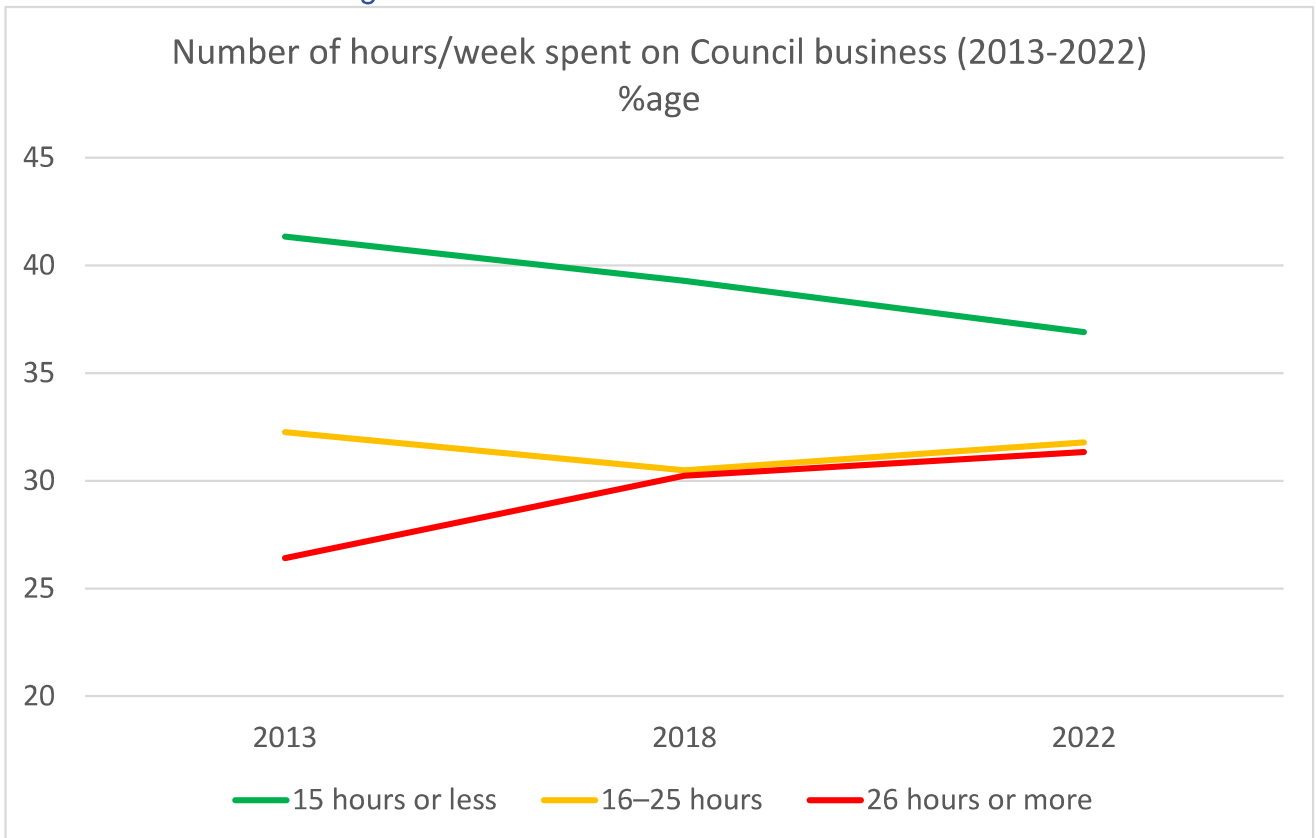
There is clearly an issue with the existing workloads of Councillors. Whilst the Councillor survey conducted by the Council demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of Councillors feel the workload is becoming more challenging, it is also borne out by the figures for Councillors seeking re-election in Solihull. In 2015 88% of Councillors stood for re-election. By 2022 only 53% of Councillors stood for re-election. There can be cyclical anomalies, or “changing of the guard” episode, but the trend appears to be continuing, with this year being the only improvement in the last nine years, and only by 10 rather than 9 Councillors seeking re-election. The figures are demonstrated in the graph below:

¹¹ <https://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/content/news/technology-increasing-stress-at-work/>



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These trends are also demonstrated by data from the LGA Councillor Census. By grouping the hours it's evident that overall there is a reduction in Councillors doing fewer hours and an increase in those doing more hours.

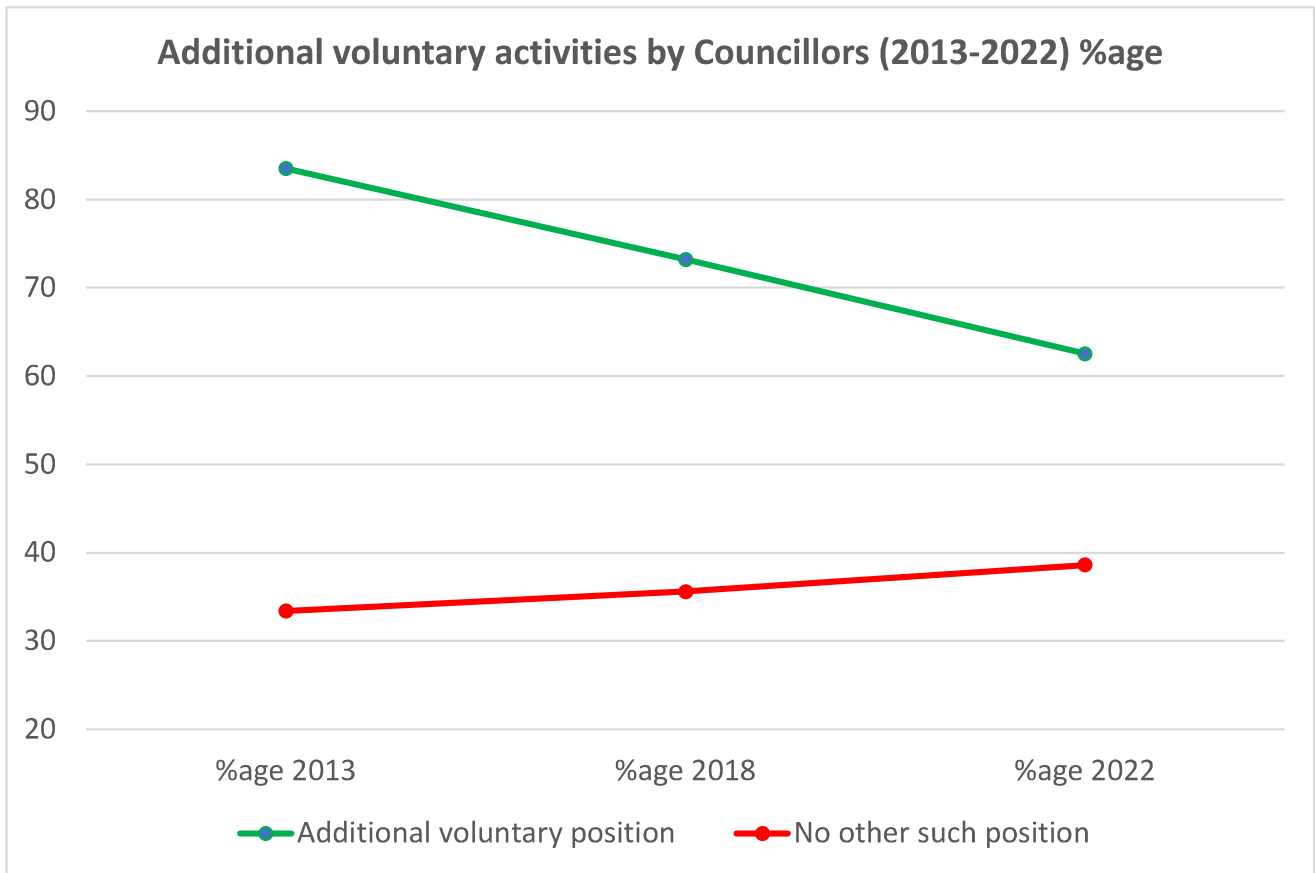


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¹² Data taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solihull_Metropolitan_Borough_Council_elections and delivered in graph by Cllr McLoughlin

¹³ <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Councillors%27%20Census%202022%20-%20report%20FINAL-210622.pdf>

The same trend can be noticed in Councillors with additional voluntary activities. Whilst there will be some Councillors who take on multiple additional activities, there has been a reduction across every category. To make the trend easier to see for Councillors taking on additional voluntary activities, a composite score has been added together for the table below:



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There are also shifting demographics of Councillors, as elected representatives more closely resemble the communities they represent. This means that there are more working age professionals, with full-time jobs, care responsibilities, or both. The ultimate aim of this review is to ensure that Solihull Council has effective democratic arrangements going forward. There are clearly challenges to this on current trends, which will only be exacerbated by future growth if the Council does not increase representation to meet demand.

Summary

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

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

¹⁴ Compiled from data in Table 23, page 20

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Councillors%27%20Census%202022%20-%20report%20FINAL-210622.pdf>

Our proposal is for a Council size of 57 Councillors with two more wards of 3 Councillors each being created. The reason for 57, rather than 60 being proposed, is to ensure that there are consistent ward sizes, electoral frequency, and an odd number of Councillors allows for political balance. Our position was revised down after reviewing the Council's submission.

The current state of play, as demonstrated in the information above, shows that there is an unsustainable situation. This means that staying at both the current number of 51 Councillors, or reducing the number of Councillors, would likely have detrimental effects on democratic representation in Solihull. We feel the Council has misread the responses from Councillors, which raised the issues of workload at present.

If the Council were to adequately cover its functions at present it would have to increase the number of Councillors by 3. The increase in vacant positions on external bodies, the reduction in incumbent Councillors seeking re-election, and the pressures of Councillors being either a bulwark between reduced services, or a replacement for cut services, suggests that there would be a need to increase by 3 Councillors. However, to accommodate the lowest population growth projections of 6.1% over the coming years that would require an increase of at least a further 3 Councillors.

The initial proposal we were making for 9 additional Councillors was to allow headroom for the higher growth estimates and allow for the Council to move to a Committee model. The Council's concerns over costs of elections and equipment mean that we have revised our figure down. It is important to note that Councillors represent a negligible cost for the Council's budget, and provide much greater value than the allowance and equipment. Poor decision making, a democratic deficit, health inequalities, and representatives who feel disempowered, disenchanting, or are simply overworked are both a greater risk and cost to the Borough. The cost of Councillors is a matter for the Council, and an Independent Remuneration Panel to consider, rather than it lead outcomes for a boundary review process.

Finally, the inequalities across the Borough, and the changing landscape that will accompany the scale of development, require Councillors who are embedded in their communities. There is a risk of Councillor being overstretched and not knowing their area and residents as well as they need to. For these reasons we ask that you increase the number of Councillors to 57.