

[Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council]

# 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.

This submission has been prepared by an Officer working Group and approved by the Council, following a recommendation from the Governance Committee.

The submission has been informed by:

- Briefings provided by the LGBCE to all Councillor, and key officers
- Current and projected electorate figures, and the substantial electorate growth in some parts of the District area in the period up to 2029
- The Councillor Survey sent out to all 51 Councillors, of whom 18 Councillors returned the survey giving a response rate of 35.3%.

## 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. This is a LGBCE scheduled review not a requested review.

## 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?

### Context

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council last changed its internal governance arrangements in 2002, when it moved from the old committee structure to a Leader and Cabinet model of executive arrangements following the Local Government Act 2000. This had the effect of streamlining the decision-making process, making decision making more transparent and clarifying accountability of the executive members. The introduction of overview and scrutiny arrangements enhanced the ability for non-executive members to be involved in shaping Council policies and services.

The Council adopted an unusual local model of executive decision making which sees the two political opposition group leaders attend Cabinet meetings in a non-voting capacity, and the spokespersons from the political opposition groups sit alongside the Cabinet Portfolio holders during their executive decision-making sessions. The opposition spokespersons are able to ask questions, express their views and seek to influence the decisions made by the Cabinet Members. This very inclusive approach makes for highly transparent political decision making with a strong element of accountability. The very low number of executive decisions that are called in for scrutiny is an indicator of the strength of this model.

A Corporate Peer Challenge led by the Local Government Association in 2020 reported *'Our overarching finding is one of a sound and well-run Council that has all of the attributes necessary to enable it to shift to the 'next level'. The authority is a traditionally stable organisation which has proud, passionate and committed staff and elected members'*.

*'Relationships between officers and Councillors are good, founded upon the clear outlining of respective roles and responsibilities and mutual trust and respect. Elected members are well supported by officers in carrying out their various roles.'*

*'The Council is committed to openness and transparency and has a range of mechanisms in place to facilitate this, entailing a mature and very advanced approach.'*

*'The Council demonstrates a strong social conscience and is very mindful of the prosperity gap and inequalities that exist within the borough.'*

Against this backdrop the Council believes the current political management arrangements work well and there are no proposals to revise the current political management arrangements or structures ahead of the LGBCE's conclusion on Council size.

### 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?

### Profile

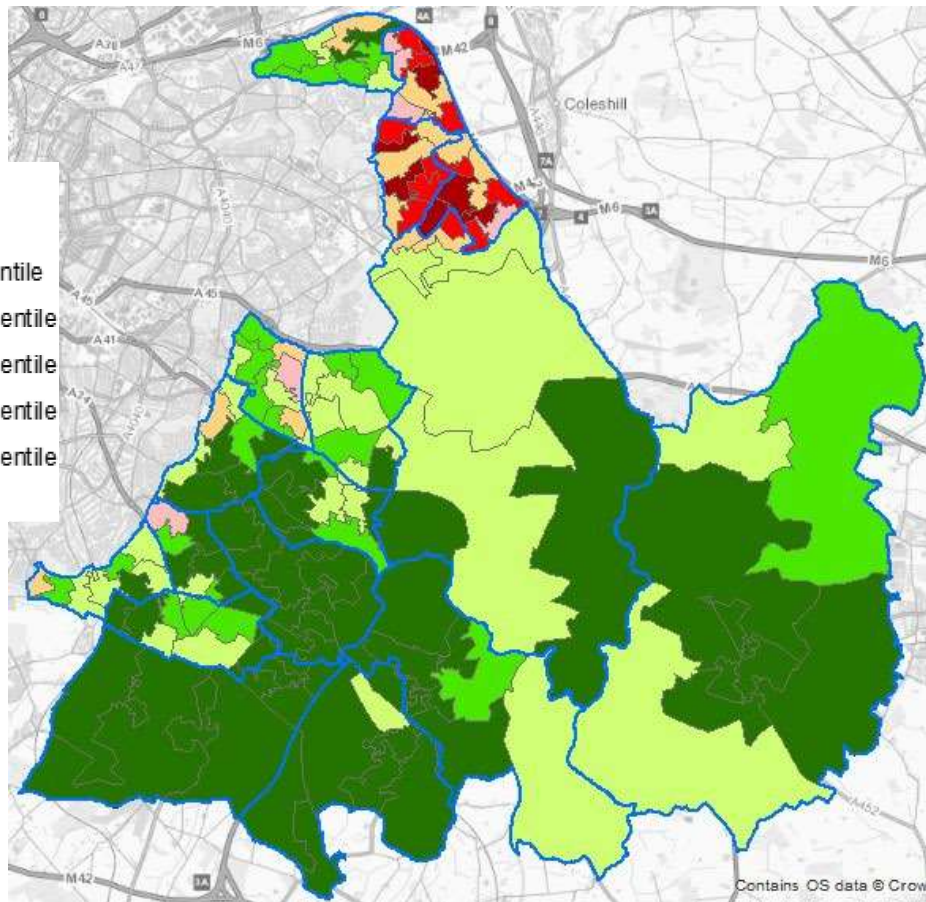
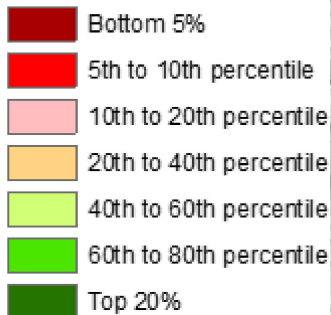
At the time of the 2021 Census 216,200 people lived in Solihull in 89,500 households. Solihull is a broadly affluent borough in both the regional and national context, characterised by above-average levels of income and home ownership. Levels and extent of deprivation are limited with only 22 of the borough's 134 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the most 20% deprived areas in the country and just six in the bottom 5%. By contrast 52 LSOAs are in the least deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in the country including 29 in the least deprived 5%.

The majority of deprived LSOA neighbourhoods are in North Solihull (20 out of 39 LSOAs are in the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in the country). However, in the south of the borough there are small pockets of relatively deprived neighbourhoods in the midst of mainly affluent wards. For instance, there are individual LSOAs in the wards of Meriden, Shirley East, Olton, Lyndon and Elmdon that are relatively more deprived than the surrounding neighbourhoods.

## 2019 IMD

### Overall Rank

#### Percentile Rank



Source: MHCLG

Contains OS data © Crown

Lying at the heart of the West Midlands motorway network, with excellent public transport connections with the Birmingham city conurbation and linked to European and global markets by Birmingham International Airport, Solihull has significant geographic and infrastructure advantages. Economically, this supports a strong service sector economy with Solihull town centre and key regional strategic assets (the NEC complex, Land Rover and the Birmingham & Blythe Valley Business Parks) primarily responsible for drawing in around 85,000 workers to the borough on a daily basis.

Solihull is in the midst of dynamic and rapid socio-demographic change. The Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) population increased from 5% of the population in 2001 to 18% in 2021. The BAME population in Solihull is similar in size to England (19%), but smaller than the West Midlands (23%). Solihull is significantly less ethnically diverse than many of its neighbouring metropolitan councils such as Birmingham (51% BAME) and Coventry (35% BAME).

Age group differences in the Solihull ethnicity profile are not available yet for 2021, although the 2011 Census shows the extent to which younger age groups are more ethnically diverse than older groups. For instance, 17% of Solihull children aged 0-15 were from a BAME group in 2011, compared 11% of those aged 16-64 and just 3% of those aged 65 and over. The current school Census shows that 28% of Solihull school age children are from a BAME background. On this basis the Solihull BAME population will continue to increase in coming years.

The second significant demographic change is Solihull's ageing population. Between 2011 and 2021 the population aged 65 and over increased by 15% (6,000 people) compared to

overall population growth of less than 5%. High levels of growth in the older population over the last 10 years are particularly evident in the very oldest of age groups, with the number of Solihull residents aged 85 and over increasing by 22% between 2011 and 2021.

Population projections based on the 2018 population estimates indicate the relative ageing of the Solihull population will continue and by 2040 those aged 65 and over will account for 23% of the borough population, with those aged 85+ numbering nearly 10,500 (4% of total). The growth in the older people population represents a significant and growing challenge in terms of health and social care. For instance, the Solihull population aged 65+ who will need help with a domestic task is projected to increase by 27% from around 13,700 to 17,300 between 2020 and 2040. Similar increases in a range of other needs are projected including a 39% rise in the number suffering from dementia.

Solihull has been divided into three localities: North Solihull, West Solihull and East Solihull.

## Solihull Locality Map

### Approximate Ward Match

#### North

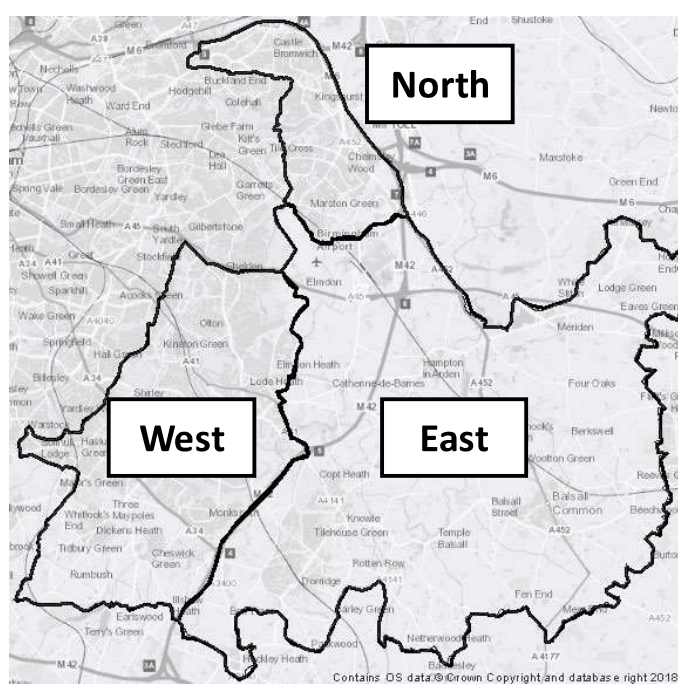
Castle Bromwich  
Chelmsley Wood  
Smith's Wood  
Kingshurst & Fordbridge

#### West

Elmdon  
Lyndon  
Silhill  
Olton  
Shirley East  
Shirley South  
Shirley West  
St Alphege  
Blythe

#### East

Bickenhill  
Meriden  
Knowle  
Dorridge & Hockley Heath



## North Solihull

There are distinct differences within North Solihull in terms of the age profile, housing structure, household composition and levels of deprivation evident in the three wards of Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst & Fordbridge and Smith's Wood and the majority of neighbourhoods in Castle Bromwich and Marston Green. Outcomes relating to health, education and crime vary accordingly as do levels of service demand, particularly in relation to Children and Family support.

- With 53% aged under 40 years, including 22% aged 0-15 years, North Solihull has a much younger age profile than the rest of the borough.
- The older population is relatively small (17% aged 65+), although like elsewhere the 65+ age group is growing fastest.
- 87% of the population are White, although the area is home to 51% of Solihull's Black/Black British population and 41% of those from a Mixed-Race background.
- Single person households are more common than elsewhere in the borough with the proportion increasing.
- Nearly half of Solihull's lone parent households live in the North Solihull locality.

- 62% of Solihull's socially rented households live in North Solihull and in some neighbourhoods in the north over 50% of all households are socially rented.
- 20 of the 39 LSOAs in North Solihull are among the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in England, with 16 of these in the bottom 10% and 6 amongst the most deprived 5%.
- The majority of North Solihull respondents to SMBC's Place Survey are satisfied with the area as a place to live (84%) with responses also showing that it is a socially cohesive area.
- 78% of people who live in North Solihull say that they belong to their immediate neighbourhood and 68% know at least five of their neighbours by name.
- Less than three in ten respondents think they can influence local decisions and at 27% participation in volunteering is the lowest in the borough.

## West Solihull

Bordering Birmingham West Solihull is the largest of the three localities and for many measures average level data masks considerable variations at neighbourhood level. Deprivation, benefit dependency and service demand are significantly higher in some of the less affluent neighbourhoods of Lyndon, Olton and Shirley than elsewhere in the locality.

- West Solihull is the largest of the three localities, 53% of the borough's population.
- With 21% aged 65 years and over, West Solihull has an older population than England. In some LSOA neighbourhoods over 15% of residents are aged 75+.
- 77% of the population are White, although the area is home to 79% of Solihull's Asian/Asian British population with this group representing around one in four of the population in parts of Shirley, Monkspath and the Coventry Road.
- Single person households are less common than the England average, although they are increasing more than other household types in West Solihull.
- The proportion of lone parent households is below the England average but is higher in some of West Solihull's more deprived neighbourhoods.
- There is a far greater proportion of owner-occupied households than across England as a whole, although in a local context socially rented households are an important feature of some neighbourhoods in Lyndon, Olton and Shirley.
- The majority of West Solihull is subject to low levels of overall deprivation, although in a local context there are relatively deprived pockets in Lyndon, Olton and Shirley. For instance, Green Hill and Hobs Moat North are among the most deprived 15% neighbourhoods in England.
- A large majority of West Solihull respondents to the Place Survey are satisfied with the area as a place to live (88%) with responses also showing that it is a socially cohesive area.
- 81% of people who live in West Solihull say that they belong to their immediate neighbourhood and 70% know at least five of their neighbours by name.
- 37% of respondents from West Solihull say that they can influence decisions in their local area, compared to 56% who don't think they can. Although this is an unfavourable response it mirrors that from across Solihull as a whole.
- Just over a third of respondents from West Solihull say that have taken part in formal volunteering for a club or organisation over the last 12 months.



## East Solihull

Covering the rural areas of the borough, deprivation is relatively limited in the East Solihull locality and compared with other areas and the demand for many services is low. However, the comparatively isolated nature of many communities in the locality and distance from service hubs presents challenges of its own, particularly providing care and support for the East's relatively large older population.

- With 26% aged 65 years and over, East Solihull has the oldest population in the borough.
- The older population is the fastest growing section of the population.
- 90% of the population are White, with all other ethnic groups under-represented compared to England as a whole.
- Single person households are less common than elsewhere in the borough, although they are increasing more than other household types.
- There is a far greater proportion of owner-occupied households than across England as a whole, although in a local context socially rented households are an important feature of some neighbourhoods in Knowle and Meriden.
- East Solihull is subject to very low levels of overall deprivation (with the exception of small parts of Meriden village), although the relatively isolated nature of some neighbourhoods means that LSOAs in the area are amongst the most deprived in relation to the IMD's Barriers to Access to Housing and Services domain.
- A large majority of East Solihull respondents to the Place Survey are satisfied with the area as a place to live (89%) with responses also showing that it is a socially cohesive area.
- 82% of people who live in East Solihull say that they belong to their immediate neighbourhood and 72% know at least five of their neighbours by name.
- 40% of respondents from East Solihull say that they can influence decisions in their local area, compared to 56% who don't think they can. Although this is a broadly unfavourable response it is more positive than other of Solihull.
- Participation in formal volunteering is the highest in the borough (38%), as is the proportion of people taking part in informal volunteering (59%).

## 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	
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Governance Model	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>The Council comprises 51 Councillors in 17 wards. Each ward elects 3 Councillors and elections are held by thirds. There are no plans to change to a different electoral cycle.</p> <p>The political balance for 2023/24 is Conservative 29, Green 13, Liberal Democrat 6, Independent 3</p> <p>The Council has chosen to operate an Executive Leader and Cabinet model of governance and this submission assumes that this model will continue.</p> <p>The Council currently has elections by thirds and again, this submission assumes this model will continue.</p> <p>The Leader of the Council is elected by all members of the Council to lead for a 4 year period. The current Leader was re-elected for a second four year term in May 2023.</p> <p>The Mayor is elected annually by Full Council and is the “first citizen” of the Borough. In addition to chairing Full Council meetings the Mayor is responsible for representing the Council at civic functions and also undertakes fundraising activities for his/her designated charity</p> <p>Full Council meetings usually take place 6 times per year. Full Council has responsibility for taking such decisions as those affecting the constitution, the budget and policy framework as well as appointing the overview and scrutiny boards and other committees.</p> <p>The Council discharges its non-executive functions through a number of standing committees. The Council also appoints five scrutiny boards which are described in more detail in the sections below.</p>

		<p>The Council appoints members as representatives on external bodies and details of these are set out later in this submission.</p>
<p>Portfolios</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i></li> </ul>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Leader appoints a Cabinet (currently the Leader plus 8 other executive members) and allocates a <a href="#">portfolio</a> to each Cabinet Member. The Leaders of the opposition political groups are entitled to attend the monthly full Cabinet meetings where they can speak but not vote.</p> <p>Being a Cabinet Member represents a significant time commitment. The Cabinet meet collectively each month to make decisions in line with the Council's overall policies and budget.</p> <p>Cabinet Members have <a href="#">delegated powers</a> and also hold their own individual decision-making sessions, at which the spokespersons of the opposing political groups attend and may speak but not vote. Most Cabinet Members have portfolio decision sessions each month, and some are held bi-monthly.</p> <p>This inclusive local model of executive decision making means that members of all political parties on the Council are actively involved in executive decision making. Each Portfolio decision session involves the Cabinet Member and also a spokesperson from the Green Group and the Liberal Democrat Group.</p> <p>Cabinet Members make most decisions on the day-to-day running of the Council and development of its strategic framework.</p> <p>Cabinet Members present reports to Full Council on activity within their portfolio and answer questions from Members on matters within their portfolio. They represent the Council externally in relationships with partners on matters within their portfolio.</p> <p>This model makes for transparency and strong accountability in decision making. However these responsibilities for Cabinet Members and the opposition spokespersons require a significant time commitment and can impose additional pressure on their ward colleagues in their representational role in their wards.</p>

		<p>This level of workload and commitment has been recognised in this submission.</p>
<p>Delegated Responsibilities</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many Councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i></li> </ul>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p><b>Delegation to Cabinet Members</b>  As set out above, Cabinet Members have delegated powers and hold their own individual decision-making sessions.</p> <p><b>Delegations to Officers</b>  The Leader of the Council has agreed an extensive <a href="#">scheme of delegation to officers</a> detailed in the Constitution and the majority of operational decisions are made by Officers under delegated powers. The effective operation of the delegation scheme relies on close co-operation and liaison between Officers and Members.</p> <p><b>Delegations to Committees</b>  The Council discharges its non-executive functions through a number of standing committees:</p> <p><b>Planning Committee</b>  This comprises of 9 Members and has delegated powers to consider all planning matters not otherwise delegated to officers. The Committee meets every 4 weeks. Planning is inevitably one of the most contentious issues locally.</p> <p><b>Governance Committee</b>  This comprises 9 members and meets on average six times a year to consider the Council’s governance functions and to maintain oversight of the Council’s HR policies. The Committee also advises on the Standards Framework for Members and through Code of Conduct Panels drawn from its membership, it considers any allegations of misconduct not dealt with under delegated powers by the Monitoring Officer.</p> <p><b>Audit Committee</b>  The Audit Committee is comprised of 3 elected members and 3 independent co-opted members, one of whom is Chair. The Audit Committee meets on average 7-8 times per year.</p> <p><b>Appeals Committee</b></p>

	<p>This is an ad hoc Committee comprised of three Members from the Governance Committee. It meets relatively infrequently to determine school transport appeals and staff appeals against dismissal.</p> <p><b>Remuneration Committee</b> This currently comprises 7 elected Members and one independent co-opted member. It meets on average four times a year and its key responsibility is to formulate and recommend to Council a Pay Policy for the remuneration of the Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Service.</p> <p><b>Licensing Committee</b> This comprises 11 Members, the minimum number permitted under legislation. It meets on average three times a year to discharge functions required under the Licensing Act 2003 including: Licensing and registration, Health and Safety at Work (as enforcing authority and Statutory nuisance legislation).</p> <p><b>Licensing Sub-Committee</b> Comprised of 5 Members, the Sub-Committee meets monthly to deal with Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle related matters</p> <p><b>Licensing Act Panel</b> Comprised of 3 members drawn from the main Licensing Committee, it meets as and when required to deal with premises licensing under the Licensing Act 2003.</p> <p><b>Solihull Health &amp; Wellbeing Board</b> Statutory membership of this Board includes the Lead Members for Children’s Services and Adult Social Services. Opposition Spokespersons are also invited to attend. The Board meets on average 6 times per year.</p> <p><b>HS2 Implementation Advisory Group</b> This Group is comprised of 7 members and meets on average 6-8 times per year. It is an advisory group and has no decision making powers.</p>
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**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	
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Internal Scrutiny	The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.
Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i></li> </ul>
Analysis	<p>The Council's approach to scrutiny relies on the active involvement of a significant number of non-executive Members to deliver effectively. This approach recognises the importance of non-executive Members' involvement in policy development and pre-decision input and scrutiny.</p> <p>The Council appoints 5 <a href="#">Scrutiny Boards</a>, each comprised of 9 members with the exception of the Education &amp; Childrens' Services Scrutiny Board which has 13 elected members and 4 co-opted members. The Council also appoints 5 Members to participate in the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee with Birmingham City Council.</p> <p>Having regard to the political make up of the Council, this is considered the minimum number of core Members to ensure that any debate is informed by a range of views and opinion, and to deliver the Scrutiny work programmes effectively.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Boards have scheduled bi-monthly meetings, with the exception of the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board which meets monthly. Additional meetings may be added to each Board's schedule as and when needed. The Scrutiny Boards appoint smaller Task and Finish Groups to focus on specific pieces of more in depth work and report back to the main Board.</p> <p>The Council's approach to scrutiny work programming encourages input from the widest possible range of elected members, officers and other interested parties, aimed at ensuring issues of importance in the borough are identified and taken forward.</p> <p>Whilst strategic and operational policy development is undertaken by Cabinet, the Scrutiny Boards have a key role in</p>

	<p>supporting improvement through strategic review of corporate policies, plans, performance and budgets.</p> <p>This comprehensive system sees scrutiny members engaged in scrutinising the full range of Council business and ensures that policy and service development has strong member input. It also allows members the opportunity, as community leaders, to make sure the local community's needs are reflected in the decisions made by the Council.</p> <p>Executive decision makers may be held to account through a Call-in Committee which meets on an ad hoc basis to scrutinise executive decisions that have been called in. The Call-in Committee has met only 3 times in the last five years, which is a reflection of the political inclusivity and robustness of the Council's executive decision making model.</p> <p>Executive decision makers are also held to account through being required to present Portfolio reports at each Council meeting and responding to questions from Members under the Council's Standing Orders.</p>	
Statutory Function	<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>	
Planning	<p>Key lines of explanation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> </ul>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p><b>Determination of planning applications</b>  The current threshold for referring a planning application to Committee is six or more representations consisting of material planning issues that are contrary to the officer recommendation.</p> <p>The rate of delegation to Officers is around 95% of all applications, so around 5% of applications are determined by the Committee. This relates to the work of the Planning Committee, but Ward Members also get involved in planning casework that doesn't then necessarily end up by being reported to Planning Committee.</p>

		<p>One area of planning work that has changed recently and is expected to increase in the next year or so, is in relation to the permission regime for HS2. Although the HS2 Act effectively gives a permission similar to an outline approval, many detailed consents are still required (similar to reserved matters, but more restricted in scope). Most are determined under delegated powers but are still subject to informal review by Cabinet Member and Planning Committee Chairman. However the significant proposals (e.g. the new Interchange Station, and 400m long viaducts) do get reported to Planning Committee and this has, and will continue to do so, triggered the need to call additional meetings of the Committee to deal with just the HS2 proposals.</p> <p>All Members of the Committee (plus any Councillor who will serve as a substitute on the Committee) are required to undergo planning training. This training covers the role and responsibilities of the Committee and the planning service, the legislative and policy framework, how planning decisions are taken and the Member Planning Code of Good Practice.</p> <p>Executive members do not currently serve on the Planning Committee and have not done so in recent years.</p> <p><b>Time commitment</b> The Committee meets every 4 weeks. In the last 12 months most Planning Committee meetings have lasted 2-3 hours. This is similar to previous years and there is limited capacity to make changes that will reduce the workload significantly.</p> <p>In addition to meeting time Members are encouraged to attend site visits and view plans prior to each meeting.</p>
Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p><b>Licensing Committee</b> The main Licensing Committee is comprised of 11 members and meets on average 4-5 times per year.</p> <p><b>Licensing Sub-Committee</b> The Licensing Sub-Committee meets on average 7-8 times per year for approximately 1-2 hours per hearing.</p> <p><b>Licensing Act Panels</b> These are appointed as required. All members of the Licensing Committee are eligible to sit on Panels and Panel membership is rotated based on availability. Panels meet on average 4-5</p>



		times per year and act in a quasi-judicial capacity to hear a range of licensing matters such as applications for premises licenses for the sale of alcohol, reviewing applications for premises licenses, applications for street trading, night cafes and betting shops.
Other Regulatory Bodies	Key lines of explanation	<p>➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i></p>
	Analysis	<p>In addition to the Scrutiny Boards, the various Committees appointed by the Council are mentioned in the section above on Delegated Responsibilities and include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning Committee</li> <li>• Governance Committee</li> <li>• Audit Committee</li> <li>• Appeals Committee</li> <li>• Remuneration Committee</li> <li>• Licensing Committee</li> <li>• Licensing Sub-Committee</li> <li>• Licensing Act Panel</li> <li>• Solihull Health &amp; Wellbeing Board</li> <li>• HS2 Implementation Advisory</li> </ul> <p><b>Allocation of Committee Places</b></p> <p>There are 79 seats available across all of the Scrutiny Boards and committees which are required to be politically balanced. These have been allocated to political groups to reflect the overall political balance on the Council. A further 14 seats are available on Committees and groups which are not required to be politically balanced. The majority of the total of 93 seats are filled by the 42 non-executive Councillors.</p> <p>The Council's Standing Orders allow political groups to nominate substitute Councillors to attend meetings in place of Councillors who may be unable to attend on any date, in order to maintain political balance.</p>
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		<p>➤ <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></p> <p>➤ <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></p> <p>➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i></p>

Analysis	<p>Executive Members represent the Council by being appointed to outside bodies, including decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies directly related to their portfolio.</p> <p>Other Councillors are nominated to external organisations as representatives and such roles are designed to allow Councillors to act as conduits for communication between the Council and the organisation and as observers at the organisation’s meetings. Where a Councillor is nominated as a representative, they may subsequently accept a role on the organisation’s board as a Trustee/Director or in any other management capacity such as Treasurer, the time commitment will vary.</p> <p><b>West Midlands Combined Authority</b>  The Council has a strong relationship and involvement with the West Midlands Combined Authority. Solihull Council played a pivotal role in setting up the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) moving powers from central government to locally elected politicians in the West Midlands. The WMCA is composed of 18 local authorities (Solihull being one of the seven constituent authorities) and four Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). It was formed in response to the context of international, national and regional challenges including skills deficits, unemployment, austerity, increasing demand for public services and the need to improve connectivity within the West Midlands.</p> <p>The creation of the WMCA meant that certain key regional functions were devolved from Central Government to the WMCA. This regional approach entails more responsibilities and duties for Councillors in the region and there are numerous Boards and Committees that Solihull Councillors are appointed to, including the main WMCA Board. For some of the Councillors appointed to these positions this represents a significant additional workload.</p> <p>Each Municipal Year the Council also makes appointments or nominations to a number of other external organisations, joint committees, panels, groups and partnerships. A number of these bodies are decision-making and /or have strategic significance. These include:</p> <p>Age UK Solihull  Arden Cross Partnership Board  Birmingham Airport Holdings Ltd  Birmingham Airport plc Community Trust Fund  Birmingham Airport plc Joint Consultative Committee  Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust  Blythe Valley Park Innovation Centre</p>
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Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens Trust  
 Corporate Parenting Board  
 Coventry and Solihull Waste Disposal Advisory Forum  
 Coventry and Solihull Waste Disposal Shareholders Panel  
 Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Foundation Trust  
 Dickens Heath Community Facility Management Committee  
 Dickens Heath Village Hall  
 Educational Foundation of George Fentham  
 Fair Trade Champion  
 George Fentham Hampton-in-Arden Trust  
 Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership  
 Joint Scrutiny Committee  
 Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership  
 Supervisory Board  
 Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership  
 Board  
 HS2 Regional Enterprise Board  
 Knowle United Charities  
 Lady Katherine Leveson Trust  
 LAYCA Trust  
 Local Government Association Assembly  
 Local Safeguarding Children's Board  
 Local Solihull Safeguarding Adults Board  
 Marston Green Village Hall Trustees  
 Meriden Sands Quarry Liaison Group  
 Meriden United Charities  
 Music Hub Advisory Board  
 PATROL Adjudication Joint Committee  
 Regional Flood & Coastal Committee  
 RoSPA Home Safety Champion  
 Rural Services Network's Rural Assembly  
 Sheldon School Foundation Charitable Trust  
 Sherbourne Recycling Limited  
 Shirley Centre Community Association  
 Sir Josiah Mason Trust  
 Solihull Bereavement Counselling Service  
 Solihull Business Partnership  
 Solihull Community Housing Board  
 Solihull Fostering Panel  
 Solihull Marriage Guidance Committee (RELATE)  
 Solihull Partnership Governing Board  
 Solihull Partnership Safer Solihull Partnership  
 Solihull Shopmobility Management Committee  
 Solihull Sports Council  
 Solihull Urban Growth Company  
 Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education  
 The Quarry Liaison Group (Meriden Sands)  
 University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust  
 Council of Governors  
 University of Aston Convocation  
 Warwickshire Playing Fields Association

	West Midlands Airport Committee West Midlands Airport Shareholders Committee West Midlands Combined Authority West Midlands Combined Authority Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee West Midlands Combined Authority Economic Growth Board West Midlands Combined Authority Environment and Energy Board West Midlands Combined Authority Growth Company West Midlands Combined Authority Housing and Land Delivery West Midlands Combined Authority Investment Board West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Committee West Midlands Combined Authority Wellbeing West Midlands Employers West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority West Midlands Pension Committee West Midlands Police and Crime Panel West Midlands Rail Executive West Midlands Shareholders Airport WMG Academy, Solihull - Governor Women's Royal Voluntary Service
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## Community Leadership

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

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> </ul>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p><b>All Councillors</b>  A general expectation of work can be found in the Councillor <a href="#">Role Description</a></p> <p>As well as attending meetings in the Civic Suite, this includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Champion the Ward and keep in touch with constituents</li> <li>• Deal with casework</li> <li>• Represent the community within the Council and other agencies</li> <li>• Campaign on local issues</li> <li>• Engage with community groups within the Ward</li> <li>• Communicate using all types of media ensuring adherence to corporate guidance for internet and social media usage</li> <li>• Act as a Corporate Parent for children and young people in the care of the Local Authority</li> <li>• Work with partners and outside bodies as a representative of the Council</li> <li>• Liaise with Town and Parish Councils in the Ward</li> <li>• Participate in decisions and activities reserved for the full Council, eg. setting budgets and strategic policy framework</li> <li>• Participate as a Member of any Scrutiny Board, Committee or other body to which appointed</li> <li>• Develop and maintain a working knowledge of the Council's policies and practices in order to make well informed decisions</li> <li>• Take personal responsibility for personal development to build understanding, knowledge and skills to ensure that the role is undertaken as effectively as possible</li> <li>• Participate in member development activities organised for Councillors</li> <li>• Interact with Officers, fellow Councillors, Partners, and members of the community in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors.</li> </ul> <p><b>Executive Members</b>  The above are all non-Executive Member roles common to all Councillors. Being a Cabinet Portfolio Holder (or political</p>

		<p>group spokesperson shadowing a portfolio holder) requires an additional time commitment in addition to their community representative role.</p> <p><b>Locality Working</b>  The Council does not have area committees but has established multi-agency groups for the East, North and West Localities which bring people together from across the public, voluntary, social enterprise and community sectors around issues of a shared interest. These groups have a specific focus on matters and issues affecting the people and communities in those areas. Each locality group has a budget of £10,000 to complement activity and actions that are agreed through the meetings.</p> <p>As locally elected community representatives, Councillors are in a unique place to understand the issues affecting and concerns of local residents and communities and they are actively encouraged to attend the locality group for their ward.</p>
	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which Councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through Councillors?</i></li> </ul>
<p>Casework</p>	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Council carried out a Member Casework Survey in April – May 2023. The individual (anonymised) responses to the Panel's questionnaire can be made available.</p> <p><b>Survey Findings</b>  Just over 35% of Members of the Council responded to the survey (compared with the response rate of 30% achieved by the LGA Councillor Census in 2022).</p> <p>The Councillors who responded to the survey included political group leaders, Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and non-executive members.</p> <p>Their length of service as a Councillor ranged from 1-5 years to over 20 years. Over half had been appointed to represent the Council on external bodies.</p> <p>Most reported that they deal with between 11-20 items of casework per month, however some reported more than 20 and some in excess of 30 cases per month.</p>

Hours on case work varied considerably from 1 to 5 hours per month to over 20 hours per month. A rough average from those responding was 10 to 15 hours per month on Council related casework.

The average hours spent attending meetings of the Council, Executive, Scrutiny Boards and Committees was between 10 to 15 per month, with some Councillors spending over 20 hours per month. A similar amount of time is spent preparing for meetings and attending training, conferences etc, again with some Councillors spending over 20 hours per month on this.

Other activities on which Councillors spend varying and, in some cases, considerable amounts of time include attendance at external meetings/outside bodies as a representative of the Council, community obligations e.g. community committees/ community forums, party political business, engaging with constituents e.g. home visits, ward walk-about, attending Parish/Town Council meetings as an elected member for the Parish area, and travel related to Councillor business.

88% of respondents said they spend more time on Council business than they expected when they became a Councillor, and the same number said the time they spend on Council business has increased in recent years.

Comments made by the respondents in relation to the free text survey questions are attached as an appendix to this submission.

### **Member Support**

The Council does not have a case management system and Councillors take responsibility for their own casework. Councillors will generally seek information and advice from officers and they are responsible for monitoring their own cases and resolving any issues. In most cases Councillors will contact officers direct either in person or via telephone or email, and then respond to the individual.

All Members are provided with a Council email address and an iPad on which they can access their email and documents for all Council, Executive, Scrutiny and other committee meetings.

Newly elected Councillors follow an induction programme and then a full learning and development programme is available through a combination of the Council's internal Learning Pool modules, the LGA online modules and workbooks and the LGA Leadership Programmes to ensure Members have the

		skills and knowledge appropriate to their roles and can make well informed decisions.
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## Other Issues

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

Click or tap here to enter text.

## 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.*

## Summary

In reaching a conclusion on preferred Council size, the Council has had regard to:

- its current governance arrangements and how it makes decisions;
- its scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the Council's responsibilities to outside bodies; and
- the role of Councillors in the local community and how they engage with their residents, conduct casework and represent the Council on local partner organisations.

The Council's existing governance arrangements are working well and the Council has been described in its most recent Corporate Peer Challenge review led by the Local Government Association as a sound and well-run Council.

The Council has no plans to change its governance arrangements or electoral cycle ahead of this review.

The Council's local model of executive decision making, with opposition spokespersons enabled to participate in Cabinet meetings and portfolio holder decision sessions, provides inclusivity and transparency however it does make for an increased workload for many of the non-executive members who shadow cabinet portfolios as well as serving on the Committees and scrutiny boards alongside their ward responsibilities and casework.

Feedback given by Councillors in the recent survey indicates that most have seen an increase in their workload since being elected and some have expressed concern about the amount of time taken up by Council work and their ability to perform effectively in their roles.

Solihull Borough is forecast to have significant population growth over the coming six years and beyond. Taking into account housing growth an increase of 17,615 electors from 2023 to 2029 is forecast, resulting in a total electorate of 179,197 by 2029. Based on the Council's current ward boundaries this will have the effect of increasing the elector to Councillor ratio and potentially further increasing the Councillors' workloads.



## Options considered

### 1. Reduce the number of Councillors:

The Council has carefully considered the question of its future size and concluded that without a significant change to the Council's governance arrangements (which is not envisaged by the Council), having regard to the predicted increase in electorate and the evidence of Councillors' workload increasing in both volume and complexity, any reduction in the number of Councillors would compromise the ability of Councillors to fulfil all of their roles effectively and provide effective strategic leadership, accountability and community leadership.

It is unlikely that the size of the Cabinet, Scrutiny Boards and other committees or the frequency of meetings and other commitments would decrease because the number and complexity of decisions and scrutiny required would not diminish. The impact of reducing the number of Councillors would be that each Councillor would see an increase in the number of committees and boards they are appointed to, which would then impact on the amount of time they have available to deal with the case work and to undertake their community leadership roles. There would be a risk that Members would be spread too thinly to be effective representatives or important roles would be confined to those Councillors with more time available.

It is important to the Council that, as far as possible, Councillors come from a range of different backgrounds, age, sex, employment status and disability. Any reduction in the size of the Council runs the risk of reducing the diversity of its Members. For those groups (eg. self-employed or working full time) who would find an increased workload a barrier to becoming a Councillor then it is likely that a smaller Council would be a significant disincentive to standing for office.

The Council therefore does not wish to see a reduction in Council size as an outcome of this review.

### 2. Increase the number of Councillors:

The Council recognises that the projected growth in population and electorate and increasing workload for Councillors could impact on the ability of Councillors to fulfil all of their roles effectively and provide effective strategic leadership, accountability and community leadership.

However, despite the increasing workload and pressures on the role, responses to the survey did not identify an appetite to increase the Council size. While a number of respondents specifically stated that the number of Councillors should not be reduced, nobody said it should be increased. Councillor comments included *'I believe to well represent the Borough that the number of Councillors is right'*, *'With current numbers the workload is just about manageable'*, *'The existing 17 Ward, 3 per Ward arrangement works very well'*, *'Overall, I think that the 51 Councillors/ 17 Wards is sufficient for proper representation in the Borough'*, and *'Having 3 Ward Cllrs per Ward is about right'*.

There is potentially scope to provide additional support to Councillors by the introduction of a casework management system and this option will be explored.

Whilst the financial implications of the Electoral Review are not one of the considerations, it is worth noting that any increase in Council size would also have a financial implication in terms of the additional costs of elections, Members' Allowances, provision of IT equipment, training and development and other support etc.

The issue of an even number of Councillors has also been raised from a political balance perspective, and it was noted that governance issues could arise if the Council were to be evenly politically balanced. This could be an issue if the Council was increased by an additional ward, creating 54 members.

The Council therefore does not believe it is appropriate to increase the Council size as an outcome of this review.

### **3. Retain the current number of Councillors**

The current elector data indicates that there are some significant imbalances in ward electorates within Solihull, with the Blythe Ward having +22.3% and Knowle Ward having -11.6% electoral variance.

It is clear that there is scope for some redistribution to create a more equitable balance of ward electorates.

When asked to provide information about their experiences as a Councillor that might be relevant to the Council's submission on council size, the feedback was generally that the current arrangement with 3 members for each of our 17 wards provides suitable representation. Some Councillors commented on the growth in their ward and the increase in pressure on their time. One of the Councillors representing the Blythe Ward made the point that there should be a fairer distribution of electors per ward, however no strong evidence was provided to indicate justification for increasing the number of Councillors for the borough.

Comparative data in relation to the Council's CIPFA nearest neighbours group currently places Solihull Council roughly in the middle in terms of average electorate per Councillor. With the projected increase in electorate by 2029 the electors per Councillor ratio for Solihull would be above the current average but would still be within the existing range for that group.

Councillors also indicated in the survey that technological progress has made communication more effective and streamlined, and that Councillors are increasingly using social media and other electronic forms of communication as part of their engagement with constituents. This is an indication of the increased transparency and accessibility for residents of the Council to its services and Elected Members using digital formats, which should go some way towards mitigating the impact of the increasing volume of casework in the future.

In addition to the Cabinet, the Council currently has 5 Scrutiny Boards and several committees/ sub-committees and working groups and appoints representatives to numerous outside bodies. Appointments to the Committees and boards are made based on the allocation of seats to reflect the political balance on the Council and it is rare that any seats remain unfilled. Similarly the appointments to outside bodies rarely have vacancies remaining, with many of the places being contested. This is an indication that the current number of Councillors is sufficient to enable the Council to function effectively without the need for additional Councillors.

The evidence considered by the Council indicates that provided the review achieves the objective of reducing the significant ward variances in the ratio of electors to Councillors, the Council should continue to have sufficient capacity to effectively operate its current governance and decision-making arrangements without any increase in the number of Councillors.

For the reasons outlined above and throughout this document the Council's preference is to retain the current arrangements with a Council of 51 Councillors, representing 17 wards and 3 Councillors per ward, with revisions to the ward boundaries as necessary to achieve electoral parity.

**Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council**  
**Council Size Submission**  
**Narrative from Councillor Survey Responses**

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**How do you deal with your ward casework?**

Above number may sometimes be higher. I always look into an issue before passing it onto officers. For example, complaints of parking near schools; I visit at appropriate times, meeting the informant first or communicating with them at least. When I have evidence I then confer with officers. This is replicated with most issues.
E mail, phone ,monthly advice bureau and home visit if required
Variety of measures: signposting, creating service requests, advocacy, guiding people through processes.
"Visit to see, Email, Meetings with officers virtually or in person "
I can deal with some there and then by phone or email, others I will. Is it the resident or location of the issue and the start a dialogue with the Council.
through personal visits, email and correspondence
I deal with casework in a variety of ways, depending on the issue or individual case. This could be emailing officers after a report from residents or if I happen to see anything whilst out and about in the Ward ( e.g. flytipping). I visit residents at their homes or pick things up in surgeries. We knock doors all year round, so that generates case work, and a lot of it comes via email or phone, after we deliver a newsletter. I've also mediated neighbour disputes with the help of SCH. However, overall, it is a never ending flow.
I ring officer or email and go from there.
Contact by email, telephone and post - plus in person as I live in the ward and involved in community organisations (Church, Youth Groups, Residents Association
Picking up casework on the street, social media, email, phone and at surgeries. Raise this with the council via email or phone and then update residents. We don't have access to any casework monitoring system, though this would help.
Experience, officer Contacts and research driven activity
I use a journal to keep track of issues and progress in resolving them.
The variety of casework in my ward is huge and includes significant amount of housing issues in addition to ASB and the usual potholes / illegal parking, etc. As such, the way I deal with it varies from case to case. Some things are forwarded to the Council's Connect system, while others require more in-depth attention such as meetings with officers or conversations with housing associations. I keep track of everything using an IT system and keep residents updated through emails and phone calls.
It depends upon the issue. A mixture of phone calls, e-mails, Facebook, letters or in person. If it is a physical issue I will usually go to see the problem prior to raising. Once I have sufficient information about the problem, I will usually raise it to the appropriate person. If I don't get a response after a reasonable time, I will chase. Once I get a response, I will either accept it or challenge, depending upon, whether I am happy with it. If I am happy with it, I will feed back to the resident, how raised it. If it is of universal interest, I may share a social media update.

Investigate the issue by discussing with resident(s). Visit site(s) as appropriate. Take photograph(s) as appropriate. Give advice as appropriate. Use online reporting or report to officers (or third parties) as appropriate. Diary and follow up as appropriate.
Usually first by phone contact to assess the issue. Then formal correspondence to SMBC particularly on planning matters. Cases via email to officers and then response to enquirer, Personal visits to constituents, through liaising with one of my four Parish Councils, Liaising with residents associations, Attending public meetings, Liaising with the Member of Parliament, Corresponding on behalf of constituents with transport for the West Midlands and the West Midlands Combined Authority, Dealing with NHS providers.
I usually spend about an hour each evening reporting issues to officers and responding to residents. I sometimes go on site visits to investigate
95% by email with some visits in person

**You said that the time you spend on Council business has changed. What do you think the reason is for this?**

Partly because I actually enjoy it - I enjoy serving. However, I believe I am partly to blame because I feel it is my duty to serve the public and they expect more from elected representatives. Social media has had a great impact here. I do not pass everything onto officers straight away. By engaging with contacts they feel someone is actually trying their best to help them.
More pressure by Central govt
Changes since the pandemic and onset of the cost of living crisis, have meant that the nature of casework is more complex, and their resolution more challenging. Many services are harder to navigate due to reduced capacity and managing residents expectations is harder.
increasing responsibility and seniority
Our team are always busy in the Ward and local communities. When you are a busy and committed team (as all elected members should be) you generate various types of casework and a large volume of it. But this is the job of an elected councillor. If you can't do this, don't become a councillor. On top of this, longer or more frequent reports are required in Council Scrutiny meetings and CPH decision sessions. There are also more Planning Applications. There will be and is an increase for demands in all services. Therefore, pressures are increasing as I outline below.
An increasing Borough population, with a 4.6% increase over the decade from 2011, to the last census in 2021 (206,700 to 216,200) puts pressure on the exiting Councillors. This has been predicted to grow a further 5.9% . (12875) by 2030 and a further 5% (11422) by 2040. This will lead to further pressures on local infrastructure, in turn, leading towards more casework. Pressures on time constraints and other issues are bound to lead to much more work than 51 Councillors can effectively and efficiently deal with.
Increasing levels of casework, more community group work which requires liaising with council and feedback.
More complex regulations, increased demand from constituents (homelessness, school places, special needs provision, planning issues, mental health, etc.)
Seen by the community as a local resident who is also their councillor and the 'go to' person for help.

I have taken on more responsibility in my group and become more familiar with the role and all it entails.
Increased responsibility
Cost of living crisis has increased casework with residents. Also reduced Council services (e.g. grass and tree cutting) has resulted in increased complaints. Additionally, there has been significant issues (e.g. on the Birmingham and Solihull ICS failings and Children's Services) that take additional research time to ensure resident concerns are addressed.
It's only changed now because I've decided to stand down and take on less for my final year.
As I have become more widely known, I get more casework. I have also got more long term projects on the go.
There are often complaints about things that are not Council business and are more Police related.
Scrutiny Board Chair role added in my second year, ie 2022/3
Increasing workload due to wide range of stakeholder requirements as well as an ever increasing caseload. Typically spending five days per month on Council appointed Directorships as well as an equivalent amount of reading time.
Cabinet roles account for at least four days per month
More demanding, growth in local population. Devolved WMCA means more activity locally

**What aspect of your duties (Council business and/or within the community) has changed the most over recent years?**

My ward is a big ward (most voters) and has undergone lots of development in recent years. Residents are socially mobile and deserve information as to what is happening around them. The growth of social media is incredible and my ward has several large facebook groups (five distinct communities have facebook groups with between 3,000 and 6,000 members in each group. They contact me via facebook posts, tagging, messenger or twitter., as well as email and telephone.
Public demand especially re planning concerns development and major alterations to domestic property
Getting problems resolved. Sending a service request used to be sufficient. Now there are more follow ups required and it has increased the time needed on each individual piece of casework.
First year as a councillor
I have more issues regarding mental health cases, neighbour disputes, housing shortage issues ( i.e. people on the SCH waiting list for 12 years) other SCH issues regarding property. Also Citizen and Bromford housing tenants approaching us after cases and disputes. There's also huge problems regarding dog mess, litter and flytipping. This will get more frequent and there will be more cases across the Borough to report, and efficiently deal with, with more residents as a result of new housing and larger Ward populations.
Now chairing a community group. They have partnership boards monthly and I'm in regular contact with representatives throughout the month.
More partnership working with other agencies (NHS, Police, etc.) requiring additional meetings. Increased demand for services (particularly SEND and Dementia) and more concentration on environmental issues

Communication with residents. The rise of social media means that I'm contacted with new casework multiple times a day.
Preparation for meetings
Increased casework associated with cost of living crisis and work on committees and scrutiny.
It all varies so much it's difficult to answer this. You need to be willing and able to respond to the present demands. Some years, there are lots of community meetings and help for community groups, whereas other years, there's more internal Council work to do, such as when there are complicated scrutiny or planning matters on the committees you're on or there's a new Local Plan in development. Other years still there's all of this at once.
Meeting decrease as the no of Lib Dem councillors has increased from 3 to 5.
I'm relatively a new Councillor, so it is changing as people get used to me and contacting me more.
regional commitments & becoming leader of the council
Not applicable- only done two years.
Larger range of decision making roles both as a Cabinet Member and appointed roles to outside bodies
More Ward work and dealing with more complex cases

**Is there anything else about your experience as a Councillor that might be relevant to the Council's submission on council size?**

My ward is huge by comparison to other wards and this reflects the amount of work I undertake as a ward councillor itself. The profile as a cabinet member adds to this. The ward is expected to grow even further through the emerging Local Development Plan. My ward may have as many as 12000 electorate at this years local elections , some 3000+ more than some other wards. I feel fairness should be applied and there are divisible and distinct boundaries to allow change.
I believe to well represent the Borough that the number of councillors is right
The demands of the role mean that many good Councillors feel unable to seek re-election. It means that the pool of potential candidates is not fully representative, and that some with the great competencies are prevented due to time requirements.
My ward is physically big with lots of change. It is also highly varied with multiple segregated communities with highly specific issues. The three councillors per ward creates a lack of clear accountability and creates unnecessarily physically large wards in rural areas.
Having three ward councillors provides scope for sharing workload and cover during absence. It also brings a mix of skills and expertise in policy areas
Having three councillors for my ward works very well as we have a huge amount of casework.
No
Yes, we have approximately 300-400 more residents in and around the Ward as a result of new building since 2015. However, outside of this, huge amounts of new building developments (Arden Cross, Balsall Common etc), will also put stresses on Councillors' time. It is increasingly becoming a full time job, but when one needs to work (allowance in SMBC lowest in West Midlands), inevitably this will lead to casework not being done - particularly large items of casework which takes much more time to resolve. Time and stresses on individuals means that SMBC will not be seen to be operating effectively.

Then there are the issues which IdVerde and Veolia need to pick up. These are reported by residents (5,000 last financial year), but with time constraints on members, these may not be picked up if members can't 'work their wards' effectively. Pressure on local road infrastructure is and has increased as has the demand better public transport. This will increase with a growing population.

Then there are the increasing pressures on Council services which are struggling in certain departments and portfolios. This will increase.

New building development will add pressure to an increasingly busy workload for many Cllrs. More capacity is required if public servants will do their jobs, efficiently and more effectively.

The natural presumption is that through this process the Council is looking to reduce the number of members. It is really important to ensure there are sufficient councillors to deal with casework and communication with constituents, which is independent of the officers. With services under financial pressure this need becomes even more acute. Also we do not want to close the door to Councillors who also work (and bring experience), and just about cope with current workloads - especially those in opposition parties where challenge is critical to effective governance of Councils. With current numbers the workload is just about manageable; but still can't do everything I'd like to.

I work full time and have a family. My husband already believes I spend too much time being a councillor. Decreasing the number of councillors would make it even more difficult for working parents like me to be councillors due to needing to shoulder the increased workload of meetings and casework.

I am a Councillor from one party and the other two councillors are from another political party. I do not know how much casework they get, so if the Councillors were significantly less, then there could be an issue with Councillors being able to spend enough time on replying to constituents and giving them the service level they probably expect.

Although I have only been a Councillor for 2 years, I have engaged significantly with the Council and Councillors for more than a decade before that and I am struggling to see any reason for change. The existing 17 Ward, 3 per Ward arrangement works very well.

Since the Cabinet and Scrutiny system was introduced workloads have increased considerably within the Council.

Having 3 Ward Cllrs per Ward is about right. We are all very busy and to reduce the number will have a very negative impact on less numbers

I am elected in Castle Bromwich which is one of the smaller wards but I stood in Elmdon last year which is one of the larger ones and required an intensive election campaign with a lot of canvassing and leafletting. Some evening out of the number of electors between wards may be desirable (but not necessarily justifying the extra cost and the disruption of full elections in 2026, which could also break continuity on some Council scrutiny boards and committees). Overall, I think that the 51 Councillors/ 17 Wards is sufficient for proper representation in the Borough.

I do not believe that current ONS predictions of population growth are consistent with the falling birth rate, falling population in Europe or the current pressure on Government to restrict legal as well as illegal immigration.