



Standards and General Purposes Committee agenda supplement

Date: Wednesday 7 July 2021

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, HP19 8FF

Agenda Item	Time	Page No
9 Buckinghamshire Council Electoral Review (Update) and Member Working Group arrangements To consider the report in the supplementary agenda.		3 - 64

Contact Officer: nick.graham@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

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Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date: 7 July 2021

Reference number: N/A

Title: Buckinghamshire Council Electoral Review - Update

Relevant councillor(s): Cllr Thomas Broom

Author and/or contact officer: Nick Graham, Director of Legal & Democratic Services

Ward(s) affected: All

Recommendations:

1. To note the work undertaken by the Member Working Group of the former Standards & General Purposes Committee.
2. To note the Council size submission to the Boundary Commission authorised by this Committee on the 25 February 2021.
3. To appoint the Member Working Group to take forward Phase 2 of the Boundary Commission's Electoral Review.

Reason for decision: To update the Committee on the work undertaken so far on the Electoral Review and to appoint a new working group.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Boundary Commission wish to undertake an Electoral Review of Buckinghamshire Council. The first phase of that Review seeks to determine what should be the appropriate size of the Council in terms of the number of Councillors.
- 1.2 Work was undertaken by the Member Working Group of the Standards & General Purposes Committee to formulate a submission from the Committee. That was approved by the Committee on the 25 February 2021 with a recommendation that the Commission should approve a Council size of 120 elected Members.

2. Content of report

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the completed template document in Annex A which largely sets out factual and contextual information about Buckinghamshire Council, its governance arrangements and structures and information regarding the electorate, housing growth etc.
- 2.2 In the Options paper (Annex B) the Working Group set out what it considers to be the key considerations including the future agenda for the Council, its ambitions concerning the involvement of Members in the strategic direction of the Council, the Scrutiny and Regulatory functions, and the role of Members as leaders in their localities. The annexes provide evidence of comparator unitary Councils largely drawn from recent data, but also referencing the earlier Ernst & Young report and the Unitary proposal from the former Buckinghamshire County Council.

3. Boundary Commission decision

- 3.1 Initially it was anticipated that the Boundary Commission would make its decision about the Council size, after the election in May 2021. They have now deferred that decision until July 2021. The decision will be either of the following: they accept the proposed number; or, they may accept a number as proposed by another group who makes a submission; or, they may seek further information from the Council.
- 3.2 Once a determination of the Council size has been made phase 2 of the work will commence. This will involve the drawing up of boundaries for the new wards. It is anticipated that this will commence from July/August 2021 and the work will be carried out during the Autumn of 2021.

4. Other options considered

4.1 N/A

5. Legal and financial implications

5.1 This is an Electoral Review undertaken by the Boundary Commission. The basis of the Commission's decision will accord with their published criteria. This paper proposes the establishment of the working group to take forward the Council's response to the Commission's work.

6. Corporate implications

6.1 The decision of the Commission will clearly impact the democratic decision-making of the Council and the role of all elected Members.

7. Consultation with local councillors & community boards

7.1 In September 2020 all Members were invited to a presentation by the Boundary Commission who addressed various questions regarding the process and decision-making.

8. Communication, engagement & further consultation

8.1 Members were sent a survey regarding the Electoral Review and asked to feedback their views on the time commitment required in undertaking the work of a Councillor. 98 responses were received.

8.2 Regular updates of by the Member Working Group have been made to the public meetings of the Standards & General Purposes Committee and the minutes of the working group have been available to all Members. Key stakeholders have been informed about the Commissions review, including towns and parishes and the business community.

8.3 The Boundary Commission can, but do not ordinarily, consult on this phase of the Review, but have an extensive consultation plan for phase 2 of the Review.

Appendices

Annex A Council size template

Annex B Options paper – with annexes

Buckinghamshire Council

Draft Council Size Submission

Buckinghamshire Council

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How to Make a Submission

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

About You

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

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This submission is made by the Standards & General Purposes Committee of Buckinghamshire Council. Under the Council's Standing Orders this Committee has the delegated authority to address electoral arrangements. The Committee formed a Member Working Group who undertake the work to complete this template and the Options Paper that accompanies it. Members were assisted in their work by senior officers of the Council.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

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

The Commission will be aware that following local government reorganisation it was both the ambition of the new unitary Council and the expectation of the Ministry of Housing & Local Government that an Electoral Review would be undertaken in the first year of the new Council.

Local Authority Profile

5. Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description may cover all, or some of the following:
 - Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraint 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 transitional populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Buckinghamshire Council's response – Local Authority Profile

- Buckinghamshire became a Unitary Authority on 1 April 2020. The Unitary Authority, Buckinghamshire Council, replaced 5 legacy councils: Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe District Councils, and Buckinghamshire County Council.
- Covered by the Chiltern Hills, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Buckinghamshire is characterised by historic market towns, ancient woodlands and beautiful countryside. There are 55 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), more than 8,000 Hectares of ancient woodland, and a national nature reserve (Burnham Beeches) which has shown inhabitation as early as the Iron Age. Buckinghamshire also has more National Trust properties than any other county in England.
Source: Natural England; Woodland Trust; National Trust
- Buckinghamshire has one of the highest life expectancy rates, lowest percentage of residents with limiting long-term illnesses and some of the best educational attainment results in the country.
Source: Department for Education / ONS (2011 Census)
- Buckinghamshire is a prosperous County, with a higher percentage of economically active residents and lower percentage of workless households compared to the South East Region and compared to England overall. The County also has a higher proportion of residents employed in occupations as Managers, Directors and Senior Officials (Standard Occupational Classification groups 1-3) compared to the South East Region and England overall.
Source: ONS annual population survey
- Average annual household income in Buckinghamshire is almost one third higher than the national average. The County has a modern service-based economy and is part of the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire NUTS-2* region, which in 2018 had the highest GDP per capita outside Inner London.

Source: ONS Annual household earnings 2017/18 & ONS Regional gross domestic product all NUTS level region 2018

* 'NUTS-2' is the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics, a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU and the UK for the application of regional policies

Population growth in Buckinghamshire

- In 2019 the total population of Buckinghamshire was 546,033 which is an increase of 7.8 % (47,220) since 2011 and is 2.5% higher than the national increase in population during the same period. Buckinghamshire now has the largest population compared to the other 13 Unitary Authorities in the South East region.

Source: ONS 2018 Population projections for local authorities (Table 2)

- The rate of growth for the 18+ population is similar to the overall Buckinghamshire figures, with 7.3% growth between 2011 and 2019, and 4.8% growth between 2014 and 2019. This is higher than growth reported in England and Wales of 5.5% between 2011 and 2019 and 3.5% between 2014 and 2019.

Source: ONS 2018 Population projections for local authorities (Table 2)

- The population size of the Wards within the county vary from Gatehouse, which is the largest at 13,348 people, to the smallest Ballinger, South Heath and Chartridge, with 2,103 people.
- Although the Buckinghamshire population increased during 2011 and 2019, at a ward level these population changes ranged from a 3% reduction in Austenwood and in Greater Hughenden, to a 36% increase in Buckingham South, a 27% increase in Grendon Underwood and a 24% increase in Luffield Abbey. The wards with the biggest population growth correspond to the areas with major new housing developments.

Source ONS Ward-level population estimates

- In 2019 Buckinghamshire had an old age dependency ratio of 32 (65+ year olds) per 100 working age (16-64 year olds). This compares with an old age dependency ratio in England of 28.6 (65+ year olds) per 100 working age (16-64 year old) population.

Source: ONS Old age dependency ratio

- Of the 546,033 people in Buckinghamshire, 23% (126,481) are children aged under 18 years old, 58% (316,071) are adults aged 18 to 64 and 19% (103,481) are aged 65 and over. 3% (14,925) of the resident population are 85 and over.

Source: ONS Old age dependency ratio

- Chart 1 and Chart 2 illustrate the forecast population growth in Buckinghamshire compared to our comparator local authorities.

Chart 1: % Forecast population growth 2019-2029

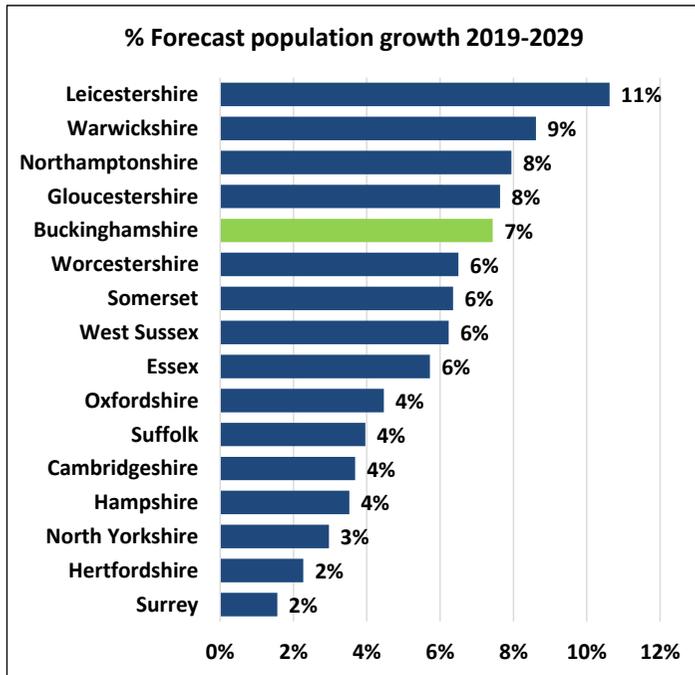
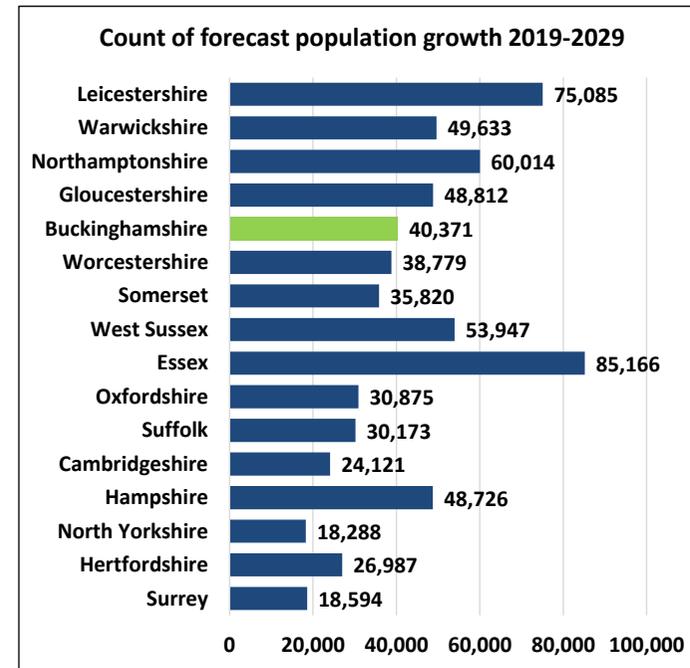


Chart 2: % Forecast population growth 2019-2029



Source: ONS 2018 Population projections for local authorities (Table 2) / Buckinghamshire Council housing-led population projection produced using Edge Analytics PopGroup software.

Migration

- The main component of Buckinghamshire's population change is Net Internal UK Migration as a result of house building within the county.
- Population growth is measured using births and deaths (known as 'natural growth') and migration. Between 2011 and 2019 natural growth resulted in an additional 17,025 people in Buckinghamshire. Over the same period, migration within the UK accounted for an additional 20,300 people and international migration (outside the UK) for an additional 6,600 people. Migration accounts for almost two thirds of the growth experienced between 2011 and 2019, with the majority of people moving from other parts of the UK.
Source: ONS population data modelled in Edge Analytics Popgroup software
- A sizeable proportion of internal UK migration to Buckinghamshire comes from people moving from West and North London boroughs as well as adjacent authority areas such as Oxfordshire, Central Bedfordshire, Milton Keynes, and Northamptonshire.
Source: ONS Internal migration: matrices of moves by local authority and region (countries of the UK).

Demographic Profile

- According to the 2011 Census, 13.6% of the population in Buckinghamshire were from a non-White ethnic background compared to 14.6% in England. The largest non-White ethnic minority group were Asian or Asian British, comprising 8.6% of the Buckinghamshire population compared to 7.8% in England and 5.2% in the South East Region.
Source: ONS (2011 Census)
- In Buckinghamshire, 5.3% of households (10,550 households) were classed as lone parent households with dependent children, compared to 7.1% in England. The proportion of households which were classed as pensioners living alone was slightly lower in Buckinghamshire (11.8%) compared to England (12.4%)
Source: ONS (2011 Census)

Deprivation and housing costs

- Although Buckinghamshire is a prosperous county, there are also struggling communities in Buckinghamshire with acute pockets of deprivation and greater need predominantly located in the urban areas of Aylesbury and High Wycombe. No areas within the county are classified as within the 10% most deprived in the country, but there are a cluster of areas that fall within the 10% most deprived for income deprivation affecting older people. There are also some areas that are in the highest decile nationally for childhood obesity.

PHE: The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) & ONS: English indices of deprivation 2019

- In 2019 the average house price in Buckinghamshire was 14 times the cost of the average salary and 60% more expensive than the national average. High housing costs and a lack of affordable housing are issues predominantly in the South of the county, where, in towns such as Beaconsfield, the average house price during the same period was more than one million pounds.

ONS: Median house prices for administrative geographies / Earnings and working hours

Electorate forecast

- The forecasts produced for the electoral review have made use of the methodology set out by the LGBCE in their guidance for the Polling District Forecasting Tool. However, they have also incorporated local intelligence about housing completions and future forecast housing growth.
- We have taken the average ratio of electors for 2018-2019 (0.97) and applied this to the 18+ population in 2026. This gives a total number of electors of 427,057. This is an increase in the electorate of 27,086 (7%) compared with the 2019 figure. This increase is down to two key elements, population increase by natural change (37%) and net migration (63%).

Source: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE); Electorate Forecasts – A Guide for Practitioners.
Source: ONS Electoral statistics for the UK / Buckinghamshire Council population forecast based on ONS data using Edge Analytics PopGroup software

Council Size

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

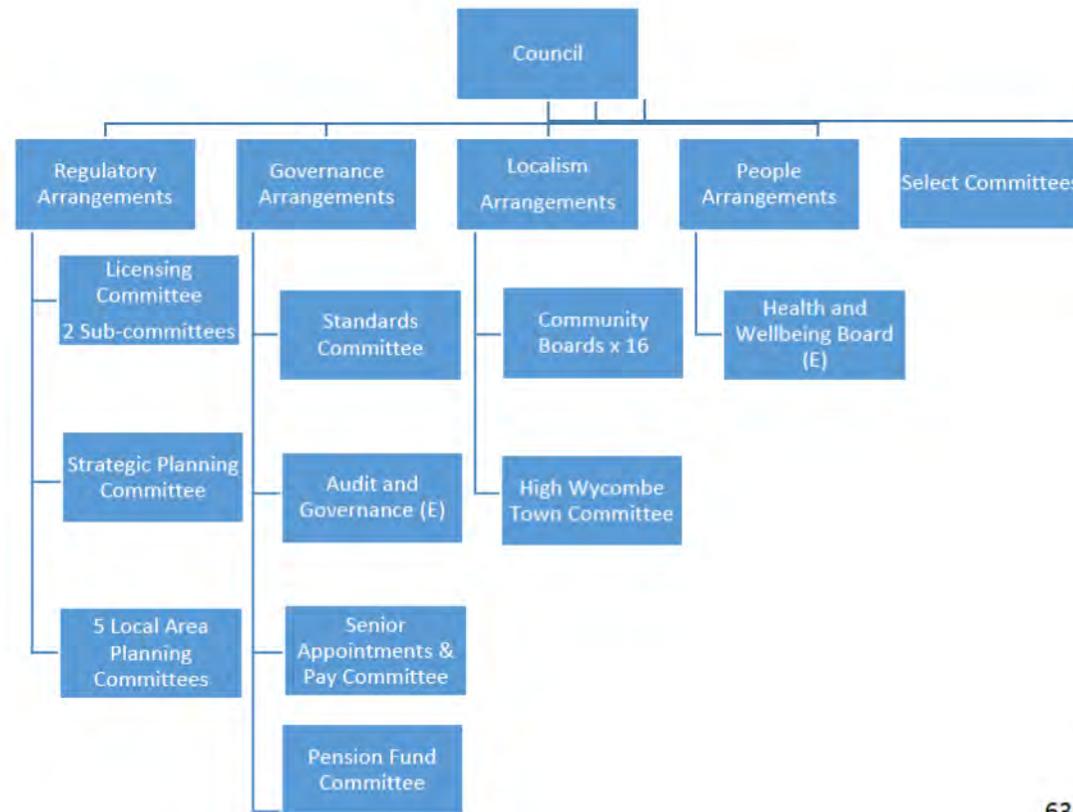
Strategic Leadership

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

Topic		
Governance Model	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>The Council has adopted the Leader and Cabinet form of governance.</p> <p>The Cabinet is made up of the Leader and up to nine other Cabinet Members. These may include up to two Deputy Leaders who are chosen and appointed by the Leader.</p> <p>The Leader may also appoint Deputy Cabinet Members to advise and assist Cabinet Members in the discharge of their duties within their portfolios. In the absence of a Cabinet Member a key decision may be taken by a Corporate Director or relevant senior officer in consultation with the appropriate Deputy Cabinet Member but a Deputy Cabinet Member is not authorised to make any decision normally made by a Cabinet Member. The number of any appointed Deputies will not exceed the number of Cabinet Members.</p> <p>For the purposes of context, there are interim governance arrangements currently in place as a result of the recent unitary transition. These arrangements will continue until the first election, which was initially anticipated to take place in May 2020, however this has been deferred until May 2021 as a result of the Covid pandemic.</p> <p>The interim arrangements are that the Leader of the former Buckinghamshire County Council, and a further 16 councillors derived from the legacy councils (who together comprised the Shadow Executive) continue in those roles until the first full election to Buckinghamshire Council. Full details of the interim arrangements are set out in Part J of the Council’s Constitution, and reflect the requirements of the Buckinghamshire Structural Changes Order 2019 and</p>

related legislation pertaining to reorganisation.

The Council has decided that certain non-executive functions which are not reserved to the Council as a whole will be the responsibility of the Committees listed below, and to officers as described later in this submission.



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The Council considers the above committee structure to be appropriate for the type and scale of the Authority, and in keeping with other similar local authorities. Whilst some of the committees are not statutory, they are considered

critical to the efficient organisation of Council business. Some advisory and operational matters may also be carried out by panels, boards or forums.

It should be noted that the committee structure set out above was designed to address the anticipated workloads of the new unitary Authority ahead of it coming into existence, and was based on a council size of 147 Members. During its first year of operation, the Council will be able to more accurately gauge its requirements and confirm a suitable future committee structure after the 2021 election. This review would also be influenced by the outcome of the boundary review and the final determination of Council size.

Part H of the Council's Constitution sets out the general responsibilities associated with the role of councillor, and details of additional responsibilities and tasks expected of Executive Members.

In addition to Members' attendance at meetings, Members will also on occasion need to take a place on a committee for which they are a substitute. Depending on the frequency of substitution, this could significantly impact on the level of commitment required of those Members. Substitutions are arranged in accordance with the Council's Constitution, Part D (Committees), Appointment of Substitute Members on Committees and Sub Committees (paragraphs 2.76 to 2-80).

Further detail regarding the time commitment required by Members is addressed in the accompanying Options Paper with an analysis of the impact of a smaller or larger cohort of Members on that commitment.

The Council also appoints Members to a number of outside bodies. A full list of the current appointments is available at <https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/mgListOutsideBodies.aspx?bcr=1>. As a result of unitary transition, there are many instances of duplicate membership of Outside Bodies arising from legacy council arrangements. Work is underway to identify and therefore reduce these duplications and ensure there is an appropriate level of representation on appropriate Outside Bodies by the new Council. Outside bodies range in frequency, location and complexity, with some appointments more onerous than others.

	Analysis																			
<p style="text-align: center;">Portfolios</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p>At the conclusion of the current interim arrangements, it is anticipated that the Council will have the maximum number of Executive Members permissible (10) and each of these Members will be assigned a specific portfolio. The particular functions to be delegated to individual members of the Cabinet by the Leader, within those specific portfolios, are set out in Part E of the Council’s Constitution.</p> <p>It is anticipated that portfolios themselves will be designed to provide a focus on the key challenges and opportunities faced by the new Council, and to deliver the benefits of integrated services. Portfolios will need to include combinations of the following areas of responsibility:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="595 619 2105 1043"> <tbody> <tr> <td>• Adults Services</td> <td>• Property</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Health</td> <td>• Waste</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Housing Services</td> <td>• Communities & Local Partnerships</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Children & Young People’s Services</td> <td>• Leisure</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Highways & Transportation</td> <td>• Culture</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Economic Development & Skills</td> <td>• Environment & Flooding</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Growth Strategy – Planning, Housing and Transport</td> <td>• Resources</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Planning</td> <td>• Customer Service</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Communications</td> <td>• Business Transformation</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The Leader may also appoint non-Cabinet Members as Deputy Cabinet Members, provided that the total number of Deputy Cabinet Members does not exceed the number of Cabinet Members. Deputy Cabinet Members will advise and assist Cabinet Members in the discharge of their duties within their portfolio(s). In the absence of a Cabinet Member, a key decision may be taken by a Corporate Director or relevant senior Officer in consultation with the appropriate Deputy Cabinet Member, although a Deputy Cabinet Member would not be authorised to make any decision normally made by a Cabinet Member.</p>	• Adults Services	• Property	• Health	• Waste	• Housing Services	• Communities & Local Partnerships	• Children & Young People’s Services	• Leisure	• Highways & Transportation	• Culture	• Economic Development & Skills	• Environment & Flooding	• Growth Strategy – Planning, Housing and Transport	• Resources	• Planning	• Customer Service	• Communications	• Business Transformation
		• Adults Services	• Property																	
• Health	• Waste																			
• Housing Services	• Communities & Local Partnerships																			
• Children & Young People’s Services	• Leisure																			
• Highways & Transportation	• Culture																			
• Economic Development & Skills	• Environment & Flooding																			
• Growth Strategy – Planning, Housing and Transport	• Resources																			
• Planning	• Customer Service																			
• Communications	• Business Transformation																			

Portfolio holder's responsibilities necessitate attendance at a greater number of committee meetings within the Council. The role of Executive Member also necessitates undertaking work in partnership with other local authorities and external organisations.

For the purposes of context, interim arrangements have seen the establishment of 17 portfolios under the following key areas of responsibility:

Portfolio	Responsibilities
1. Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Strategy • Economic Development • Strategic Infrastructure • Policy, Communications and Democratic Services
2. Executive Member for Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Relations • Digital Strategy • ICT delivery • Financial reporting • Procurement • HR • Legal • Member Development • Corporate Performance Reporting
3. Executive Member for Adult Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding Older People • Mental Health • Physical Disability • Learning Disability
4. Executive Member for Property & Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural Estate management • Property Management • Property Rationalisation • Acquisitions

		<p>5. Executive Member for Communities & Public Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locality Working • Libraries/Customer Access Points • Voluntary and Community Sector • Health Partnerships • Public Health • Community Safety
		<p>6. Executive Member for Sports & Leisure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Parks • Country Parks • Leisure Centres • Sports facilities • Input to S106 Sports provision
		<p>7. Executive Member for Culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Strategy • Museums • Historic Buildings • Archaeology Services • Archives
		<p>8. Executive Member for Children’s Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding • Children with Disabilities • Children in Need • Early Help
		<p>9. Executive Member for Youth Provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering and Adoption • Corporate Parenting delivery • Transition to adulthood • Youth skills and apprenticeship for Care Leavers
		<p>10. Executive Member for Education & Skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring Education Provision • School Improvement • Adult Learning • Life Long Skills • SEND

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Years • Home to School Transport Policy
		11. Executive Member for Housing & Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing stock allocation and management • Liaison with Registered Providers • Eliminating Homelessness • Rough Sleeping • New Affordable Housing strategy
		12. Executive Member for Regulatory Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trading Standards • Licencing • Registrars • Coroners • Crematoria • Cemeteries
		13. Executive Member for Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport Strategy • Highways • Asset management • Footpaths, bridges, structures • Strategic Flood Management • Rights of Way • HS2 interface
		14. Executive Member for Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home to School Transport Delivery • Integrated Transport • Parking • Buses
		15. Executive Member for Planning & Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Planning • Development of Council Owned sites • Development Management • Affordable Housing Development • Housing Delivery Test

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and Building Regulation Enforcement
	16. Executive Member for Town Centre Regeneration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regeneration of Aylesbury Town Centre • Aylesbury Garden Town • Implementation of Wycombe Town Centre Strategy
	17. Executive Member for Environment & Climate Change		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Policy • Waste Strategy and Management • Action on Mitigating Climate Change • Energy Policy • Natural Environment Partnership • Agricultural estate policy • Member of Aylesbury Garden Town Board
Analysis	<p>Given the level of responsibility, it is expected that the role of Executive Member is a full-time one. It should be emphasised however that those Members who are not Executive Members have more flexibility in terms of assuming additional responsibilities and therefore can manage the associated time commitments. It should be looked at as a sliding scale with more time being committed by Committee Chairmen and Vice Chairmen, and members of committees which meet more frequently such as Planning and Strategic Sites. The new Community Boards impact all Councillors and the time required will depend on the number of Boards they attend. The Council strives to attract elected Members that truly represent the areas' entire population, and it is desirable that the Council attracts people who are engaged in full or part-time work as well as being a Councillor.</p> <p>In terms of decision making, the Council has decided that other than certain functions reserved to Council, all other functions including local choice functions, are to be executive functions. Responsibility for these functions rests with the Leader of the Council who will decide which of these functions s/he wishes to perform personally and which are to be delegated to Cabinet, a Cabinet Committee, individual Cabinet Members, or to officers. Part E of the Council's Constitution offers further explanation on the operation of the Executive.</p>		

Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>There is a scheme of delegation to senior officers laid out in the Constitution at Part I which permits officers to take delegated decisions, many of which are in consultation with the relevant Executive Member. Supplementary schemes of delegations are in place in relation to key individual service areas, further delegating certain responsibilities to appropriate officers in the Authority.</p> <p>The mechanics of the decision making process employed by the Council is set out in the Council's Constitution at Part A, paragraph 1.26 onward.</p>

Accountability

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

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.
Key lines of explanation	<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. Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i>
Analysis	<p>Buckinghamshire Council Response</p> <p>The principal means of accountability within the authority is delivered through the Council’s overview and scrutiny process. Since 1 April 2020 (when the Buckinghamshire Council was created) six Select Committees have operated and cover the following areas of responsibility (the detailed functions are set out in Part G of the Constitution):-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Education • Communities and Localism • Finance and Resources • Growth, Infrastructure and Housing • Health and Adult Social Care • Transport, Environment and Climate Change <p>In addition, an Overview and Scrutiny – Budget Task and Finish Group will be put together in early January each year to scrutinise Cabinet’s proposed budget for the following year. This process will involve 3-4 days of meetings with each of the Cabinet Members to scrutinise the draft budget proposed for their area of responsibility. Recommendations are</p>

then agreed and submitted to Cabinet for consideration before they submit their budget to full Council for approval in February.

Whilst providing the opportunity for elected Members to hold the Cabinet to account it also provides a forum for residents to seek answers to questions from Cabinet Members and in some cases external organisations, and to challenge proposals. As the Buckinghamshire Council is a new organisation it is not possible to provide comparative information on the number of residents or partners who have attended Select Committee meetings over time. However, as stated in the Constitution, one of the 6 expectations within the remit of Select Committees is that they will, “Work to ensure that communities are engaged in the scrutiny process; and consider and implement mechanisms to encourage and enhance community participation in the development of policy options.”

These select committees have a dual role in that they support the Cabinet in developing policy (overview), whilst they also hold it to account (scrutiny).

The Council also has a call-in process that allows elected Members to request the call-in of decisions that have been taken by the Cabinet. However, as it is anticipated that the majority of controversial items or those on which there might be a public interest will be considered by the Select Committees before a decision is taken by the Cabinet, it is estimated that there will be a small number of call-ins. This has been the situation for all five of the legacy Councils that came together to create the Buckinghamshire Council, as follows:

- The County Council had 7 call-ins during the period February 2011 to March 2020
- Aylesbury Vale District Council had 10 call-ins during the period February 2011 to March 2020 (none in the last 2 years)
- Chiltern District Council had 0 call-ins during the period February 2011 to March 2020.
- South Bucks District Council had 1 call-in during the period February 2011 to March 2020.
- Wycombe District Council had 3 call-ins during the period February 2011 to March 2020.

Select Committees may also carry out detailed task and finish reviews, as required, with the membership of reviews

		<p>drawn from the select committee. These reviews may involve an additional time commitment for Members.</p> <p>The Council currently has six Select Committees, with 92 members between them.</p> <p>Minutes and agenda of the Select Committees will be published online at https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1</p>
	Statutory Function	This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?
Planning	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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 committees for Members?</i>
	Analysis	<p>Proportion of applications determined by Members</p> <p>The Buckinghamshire Council Constitution aims for 100% delegation to officers. However, certain applications can be 'called in' to committee by any Member, subject to providing material planning reasons for doing so and following consultation between the Chairman & Lead Planning Officer.</p> <p>These include anything which is submitted under the relevant applications seeking full planning permission, outline planning permission or a reserved matters approval. This also includes variations of conditions but excludes Permission in Principle (PIP).</p> <p>It also does not include any applications that fall outside this bracket which are referred to as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Related Matters and • Follow On Decisions <p>as set out below:</p>

Related matters:

There are many types of planning decisions in addition to actual planning applications, notifications and consents which are defined above and these are being called Related Matters and they include, but are not limited to:

- Permitted Development,
- Prior Approvals,
- Advertisement Consent,
- Tree Preservation Orders,
- High Hedges
- Listed Building Consent

Follow On Decisions:

Once a decision to approve has been issued there are often consequent matters that need resolution. These are referred to as 'Follow On Decisions' and they include, but are not limited to, discharges of conditions, Legal Agreements and non-material amendments. Furthermore, any applications submitted by the Council, a councillor, a Chief Officer, Corporate Director, Service Director, a Planning Officer or other officer of the Council will automatically have to be considered by the relevant planning committee.

It is early days in the operation of the committees but at the moment it is considered that in the region of 2-3% of applications may be determined by Members.

How has this changed in the last few years?

Prior to the formation of the Buckinghamshire Council the former legacy councils each had different constitutions and therefore different call-in procedures applied.

Area Planning Committees

Within Buckinghamshire Council there are 5 Area Planning Committees covering the Council Area – West (previously Wycombe), East & South (previously Chiltern and South Bucks) and Central & North (previously Aylesbury Vale) as well as the strategic planning committee.

Strategic Planning Committee

This committee has responsibility for:

- a. wider strategic development;
- b. sites which have a significant impact beyond the specific local area; and
- c. sites fundamental to the implementation of an adopted or emerging Local Plan, including i) Major infrastructure; ii) Minerals and Waste; iii) Secondary Schools; and iv) Large Scale Major Development comprising:
 - Housing (approx. 400 dwellings or more)
 - Employment (approx. 10,000 sq m or 2 hectares or more)
 - Retail (approx. 10,000 sq m or 2 hectares or more)

The Strategic Planning Committee also determines all public rights of way, Common Land and Town or Village Green applications where the Service Director of Planning and Environment or the Service Director Highways and Technical Services elects not to exercise delegated authority and refers the application to committee.

Will executive members serve of the committee?

In respect of the five Area Planning Committees, at Para. 4.5 of the Constitution, it states that “*Cabinet Members and Deputy Cabinet Members may not be a member of these Committees*”. Furthermore, it also states that the “*Chairman of*

Strategic Sites Committee may not sit on any Area Planning Committee”.

In respect of the Strategic Planning Committee, at Para. 4.4 of the Constitution, it states that *“Cabinet Members or Deputy Cabinet Members may not be a member of this Committee”.*

What will be the time commitment for members of the planning committee?

It should be acknowledged that presently all Committee meetings, both Area and Strategic, take place virtually. It is not yet known when meetings will re-commence within respective council chambers.

Essentially, a planning committee for each area and one strategic planning committee are programmed to take place each month. Area Planning Committee meetings take place on a Tuesday, Wednesday or a Thursday, starting at either 2:30pm or 6:30pm. The Strategic Planning Committee takes place at the Gateway in Aylesbury on a Thursday and starts at 2:00pm.

TABLE.1: Committees having taken place since Buckinghamshire Council came into being on 1 April, 2020 and up to 19 October, 2020.

Planning Committee	Day of the week	Committees between 1/4 - 12/8/20	No. of app's on agenda	Duration of meeting	Average length of time per application
West	Tues	23 June	4	2 hrs 16 mins	34 mins
West	Tues	18 August	1	15 minutes	15 mins
West	Tues	15 September	4	2 hrs 15 mins	34 mins
West	Tues	13 October	3	1 hr 26 mins	29 mins
East	Tues	16 June	7	3 hrs 26 mins	29 mins
East	Tues	30 June	2	1 hr 5 mins	32.5 mins
East	Tues	28 July	2	2 hrs 10 mins	65 mins

East	Tue	25 August	5	2 hrs 6 mins	25 mins
East	Tue	20 October	4	1 hr 50 mins	27.5 mins
South	Tues	9 June	3	2 hrs	40 mins
South	Tues	7 July	2	1 hr 42 mins	51 mins
South	Tues	4 August	3	1 hr 50 mins	37 mins
South	Tues	1 September	1	1 hr 54 mins	114 mins
South	Tues	29 September	3	1 hr 26 mins	29 mins
South	Tues	27 October	3	2 hrs 8 mins	43 mins
North	Weds	10 July	1	2 hrs 15 mins	135 mins
Central	Thurs	25 June	3	4 hrs 25 mins	89 mins
Central	Thurs	23 July	2	2 hrs 5 mins	62.5 mins
Central	Thurs	17 September	1	1 hr 40 mins	100 mins
Strategic	Thurs	11 June	3	4 hrs 13 mins	84 mins
Strategic	Thurs	9 July	3	2 hrs 42 mins	54 mins
Strategic	Thurs	6 August	1	1 hr	60 mins
Strategic	Thurs	3 September	3	3 hrs 21 mins	67 mins
Strategic	Thurs	1 October	3	2 hrs 42 mins	54 mins

It should be noted that some Members currently sit on both an area planning committee and the strategic planning committee (currently 7 Members sit on two committees).

However, the commitment is not just to the meeting itself. Any potential planning committee member needs to be aware of the need to account for:

Site visits – this is referred to/clarified in Paragraphs 3.28 and 18.1 – 18.2 of the Constitution. Furthermore, paragraph 15.3 of the Planning Protocol states that committee members should *“Try to attend site visits organised by the Council*

		<p><i>where possible</i>". However, since the new Buckinghamshire Council came into being it has not yet been possible for Committees to operate in this way due to restrictions imposed as a result of COVID. Members have where possible done individual site visits.</p> <p>Briefing meeting(s) - these are normally attended by the Chair and Vice Chair of the planning committee meeting as well as the presenting & lead planning officer(s) and a principal Solicitor. These meetings can take place some days before or on the day of the committee meeting itself. These meetings can take anything from half an hour to a couple of hours, depending on the complexity of the planning applications which are to be considered by the relevant committee meeting.</p> <p>Preparation for the meeting itself</p> <p>All members will need to make adequate time to read and fully comprehend a planning committee agenda. Again, the complexity of the applications being considered will determine how long members will need to devote to reading and research, and whether there is a need to visit the site. Prior contact with a planning officer, in order to seek clarification on a matter(s) is encouraged as this can ultimately save time at the planning committee meeting itself.</p>
Licensing	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i> ➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i>
	Analysis	<p>The Council has a standing Licensing Committee (of 15 Members) and also arranges Licensing Sub-Committee hearings (to conduct hearings and make determinations in respect of the Council's statutory licensing functions) and Regulatory Sub-Committee hearings (to conduct hearings and make determinations in respect of the Council's regulatory licensing functions), as necessary, constituting 3 of the 15 Members of the Licensing Committee. Meetings of the Licensing Committee are arranged every 2 months, with 6 meetings taking place between July 2020 and March 2021. Ten Licensing Sub-Committee meetings have been held since April 2020, although 3 of those meetings were cancelled before the hearings were held. Any Member of the Licensing Committee can serve on the Sub-Committees with training being provided on an annual basis for Members.</p>

Other Regulatory Bodies	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i> ➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i>
	Analysis	<p>The Council has appointed a number of other Committees to assist with the discharge of its functions as set out in the Council’s Constitution. The cycles of the meetings vary but generally they are programmed to meet between four and six times per year. These committees are: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit and Governance • Aylesbury Vale Estates Board • Buckinghamshire Historic Buildings Trust • Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum • Buckinghamshire Council and Surrey County Council Joint Trading Service • High Wycombe Town Board • High Wycombe Town Committee • Local Access Forum • Pension Fund Board • Pension Fund Committee • Pinewood Community Liaison Committee • Rural Forum • Schools Forum • Senior Pay and Appointments Committee • Standards and General Purposes
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will Executive Members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i>
Analysis		<p>The Council is involved in numerous bodies at a local, regional, sub-regional and national level with a range of partners, many of which have decision-making powers that includes the following: -</p>

- Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire authority
- Buckinghamshire Growth Board
- Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel
- Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Chiltern AONB
- PATROL (Parking and Traffic Regulations Outside London) Adjudication Joint Committee
- Buckinghamshire Business First
- Clinical Commissioning Group
- Health & Well-Being Board

In addition, the Council is also involved in a wide range of strategic, general and ward-based outside bodies all of which impact on the time commitment of Members. Representation on these bodies is drawn from all Members of the Council, although some of the appointments are required to be Executive Members or local Ward Members. A total of 11% of these appointments must be filled by an Executive Member. For all others any Member could take part, these are not politically proportionate appointments. The majority of appointments to outside bodies are non-Executive Members. The commitment for these outside bodies is set out below:-

External partnerships	Current (195 Members)	From 6/5/2021 (with 147 Members)
External partnerships and outside bodies	122	122
Total appointments	198	198
Total meetings (est. at 2-3 meetings per body, per year)	305	305
Average appointments per Member	1.0	1.35
Average meetings per Member (per year)	1.54	2.07

Information on outside bodies is available at <https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/mgListOutsideBodies.aspx?bcr=1>

	<p>In addition to the above Members can also seek appointment to local school governing bodies. Whilst the number of Members appointed as governors of maintained schools in the area has fallen from 92 to 11, this reflects the general movement towards academies which now make up 40% of schools in Buckinghamshire. Whilst being a Governor is a matter of personal choice for any Members, it is seen by many as an important way in which Councillors can support their communities. This is a further commitment for these Members, which will continue in the future.</p>
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Community Involvement

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

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	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>The Council has a number of joint committees who influence decisions, support local place-shaping and encourage local participation. These committees support local governance and engagement to resolve matters locally and usually meet quarterly.</p> <p>The Council has established 16 Community Boards covering the whole of the Council area. The Boards are a new initiative to bring the Council, groups, organisations and local people together to look at local issues and find creative ways of improving local areas. These are at an early stage of their development. In some areas, they have replaced previous arrangements; in other areas they are completely new.</p> <p>The Boards set priorities and the majority have established working groups on specific projects and issues. Each Community Board will have five formal public meetings each year, with the working group meetings held in addition to these meetings. Whilst it is envisaged that not all working groups will need to involve councillors in the longer term, at</p>

this stage of their development local councillors are attending all meetings. The Community Boards have been allocated funding totalling £3.9m which can be allocated in areas including health and well-being, transport and road safety, the environment, and Covid-19 related issues. Minutes and agenda of Community Boards will be published online at <https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

Each Councillor is automatically a member of the Community Board for their Ward. Due to the postponement of the 2020 elections, and complications around the lack of co-terminus boundaries between the predecessor County Council and the four District Councils, 42 Councillors are currently serving on more than one Community Board. However, this position will change for some Councillors only participating on one Community Board following the 2021 local elections but for others it will increase with some members being on three Community Boards (for example the Penn Wood and Old Amersham Ward). Information on Community Boards is available at <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/community-and-safety/improving-your-local-community/>

It is envisaged that the boundaries of the Community Boards would become co-terminus with the new ward boundaries of the Council following the electoral review.

In addition to Community Boards, it is for local Members to determine how to undertake their representational roles. In those areas where growth has been highest Members have advised that they spend more time than previously with third parties and developers, engaging in the design and development of infrastructure projects. This requirement is likely to continue into the future.

There is a mix of approaches across the Council that includes use of social media and surgeries. Some Members are also town and parish councillors but there is no minimum requirement in relation to this. The increase in the use of social media has a significant impact on the role of elected Members with regard to expectations and changing the nature of the conversation that Members have with their residents. Social media provides a platform for Members to engage with residents; gather knowledge and feedback; canvas opinion; and publicise local campaigns. If Members elect to use social media to communicate with their constituents in this way, those Members would need to allocate a commensurate amount of time for this, and also to accommodate the sense of immediacy associated with the medium.

		<p>Anecdotal evidence suggests that some Members and residents prefer traditional face to face meetings, although this approach is necessarily more time consuming and would not allow the same degree of coverage facilitated by social media.</p> <p>Buckinghamshire is nearly fully parished, with the notable exception of the Wycombe Town area, and accordingly Members will in all likelihood have one or more parish / town councils within their ward area. Should Members wish to attend meetings of these parishes (or if they are members of those councils themselves) this would impose an additional time commitment. Similarly, regular engagement with these councils will often give rise to additional casework in order to help resolve issues of importance to local communities, particularly where the solution may involve liaison with the principal Authority.</p>
Casework	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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? ➤ What support do members receive? ➤ How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?
	Analysis	<p>There is no mandatory scheme for responding to casework neither is there guidance provided to Members, it is a matter of individual preference how Members undertake their casework. Officer support is provided to the Leader and Cabinet Members to support them in their role, which sometimes includes minor support on casework. However, no officer support is provided to non-Executive Councillors. Councillors contact Democratic Services for advice in relation to casework, usually involving help finding the relevant person or department to contact.</p> <p>Residents do expect Councillors to be available at short notice to respond to their issues. This can make it difficult for Members to work within any planned programme of activity, and creates significant pressures in some weeks, which increases for those on Committees like Planning where controversial issues are regularly being dealt with.</p> <p>Proposals for the new unitary Authority were carefully developed to ensure that residents would benefit from an</p>

appropriate level of representation from their local councillors, in the context of the then current warding arrangements. Should warding arrangements and council size be altered as a result of the boundary review, care should be taken to ensure continued appropriate levels of representation remain in place at a local level. It is also important that elected Members reflect the demographics of the communities that they represent, and as such, the role of councillor should be sufficiently flexible that it attracts individuals from all walks of life and with differing amounts of time to commit to the role.

A survey of Members was undertaken by the Member Working Group in September-October 2020 to provide an indication of how many times they were contacted (via email, phone or by mail) on a weekly basis, as well as:

- on average, how many hours were spent on a weekly basis on casework, representing / supporting the community, and attending Town / Parish Council meetings.
- on average, how much time was spent on a monthly basis preparing for / attending meetings of outside bodies, Community Boards and their Working Groups, and Council/Committee meetings.
- the extent to which they felt that an average of approximately 16 hours per week for all Councillor related work was an accurate reflection of their experience.

To add some context to the time commitments estimated by members, during the period that the Buckinghamshire Council has been formed, meetings have taken place remotely, so no time has been added in for travelling to meetings in this Survey. Most of these meetings will be held in Aylesbury where in normal times traffic can be unpredictable and everyone adds in extra travel time. Distances have also increased for most Councillors as District Council Offices were nearer to their homes / places of usual work. This additional travel time needs to be estimated and added to Councillor hours.

A questionnaire was sent to councillors during September-October 2020 following the LGBCE briefing, which was responded to by 98 Members (50.5% of the current membership). The survey results were as follows:-

Summary

Overall Time Commitment – (with the current 194 Members) – Those councillors who responded feel that the average of 16 hours a week underestimates the work required of them, with 50% (49 out of 98 responses) saying this was “Not enough”. 39.8% (39 responders) thought that 16 hours was “About right” whilst 10.2% (10 responders) felt this figure was “Too much”.

The survey asked councillors to summarise time spent on weekly contact, casework, representation in the community, town/parish councils and other work for outside bodies and Community Boards on a monthly basis. There was a lot of variation in the responses, depending on whether Members were Cabinet members, involved in multiple parish councils and even the type of Ward (i.e. urban, rural, urban/rural mix) they represented.

Contact/queries – the majority of Members stated they were contacted via email. Some councillors were only contacted a few times per week whereas others had a very high number of contacts. The average is between 20-50 instances of contact per week.

Time spent on casework – responses varied greatly, with some councillors spending under 10 hours a week on casework whilst others detailed over 20 hours. A few councillors mentioned that casework had increased due since the start of the Covid-19 epidemic but found it hard to quantify as they dealt with residents’ issues as and when they arose.

Time spent on Town/Parish Councils, Outside Bodies and Community Boards – responses again varied greatly. On average, Councillors spent 2-4 hours per work on Town/Parish Council related issues, with a couple of Members stating over 20 hours per week had been spent, as they had to attend multiple Parish Councils and resident associations.

For those who are Board Members or governors of outside bodies, there can be bulky paper packs to read and digest, and some of the administration work takes up time, for example writing up questions for Cabinet and Select Committees – which can take on average around 10 hours per month.

The majority of Councillors felt that the time spent on preparing for Community Boards would increase as they found

their feet (e.g. many were now establishing sub-Groups), although at the moment the time commitment was a few hours a month. For other council/committee meetings, some Councillors spend under 10 hours a month, while others spend over 20 hours. This rises sharply for Cabinet Members, with one stating over 100 hours, but it was mentioned that Covid had reduced travelling time with the lack of site visits and physical meetings.

Other issues for consideration – the final survey question asked Councillors for other issues that they believed should be considered when deciding on future Councillor numbers. By far the most common response was the time-consuming nature of being a councillor and how this isn't compatible for those with full time jobs, for example many meetings are held during working hours. Many expressed concerns that this excludes a diverse range of people from representing their communities, and councillors want to ensure that it's not just business owners, full time politicians or those who are retired who have the opportunity to be a councillor.

The second most common theme was that planning is by far the most time-consuming work. Also mentioned was the time spent reading documents in preparation for meetings and the unofficial work undertaken – administrative tasks, attending briefing and training sessions, responding to officer emails and other ad hoc tasks and finish groups, ie. Budget Scrutiny. It was noted that community-based work with Town and Parish Councils appeared to have risen, possibly as a result of the amalgamation of council functions into the new Authority, and would be likely to continue to rise. This would affect some councillors more than others, as some lived in densely populated areas with a couple of Parish Councils whilst others lived in rural areas with multiple very active Parish Councils.

In summary, the role of the elected Member varies greatly, and the level of involvement and time committed to the role. Members are appointed to roles and Committees by their political leadership, so they may indicate areas of interest and hours of availability but are not guaranteed anything. Though in theory Councillors can reduce hours by not accepting positions, like any work environment in reality this is rarely done in practice as it also limits their input into decisions and future opportunities to make their expertise count. There is naturally a direct correlation between the ability of a Member to be involved and influence the work of the Council and the amount of time a Member can commit. Adopting an efficient approach to managing casework and communications with residents is a great help in managing time and only seeking nomination to a particular number of committees can make the role flexible to individual circumstances but

		this is not fully in the control of the Member.
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Other Issues

10.

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Legal Changes & Notices	
10 Local Orders	<p>Provide copies of all Orders made since the last Electoral Review was implemented.</p> <p>Buckinghamshire Council is a newly formed unitary Council which came into being on 1 April 2020, and it is anticipated that an Electoral Review would be necessary during the formative years of the new Council. Therefore to date there have been no relevant Orders made. For context, the Commission will be aware of the following Orders made in relation to the former District and County Councils of Buckinghamshire:</p> <p>The Local Government (Coronavirus)(Structural Changes)(Consequential Amendments)(England) Regulations 2020 Buckinghamshire (Structural Changes) Order 2019/957 Aylesbury Vale (Electoral Changes) Order 2014 The South Bucks (Electoral Changes) Order 2014 Buckinghamshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2012 (Buckinghamshire County Council) The District of Chiltern (Electoral Changes) Order 2002 The District of Wycombe (Electoral Changes) Order 2002</p>
11 Governance Changes	<p>Provide copies of any resolutions that have been passed regarding changes to electoral cycles or governance arrangements.</p> <p>None</p>

Summary

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

Please see accompanying Options Paper.

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Annex B DRAFT (Version: 11)

Council Size Options Paper - Councillor Numbers

Introduction and General Principles

1. This paper should be read alongside the Local Government Boundary Commission's (LGBCE) Council size completed template.
2. Whilst acknowledging that each Council and Council area is different, the Guidance from the LGBCE makes clear that the determination of the appropriate number of Councillors for any given Council requires a consideration of the number of factors, specifically: the size of the Council must enable it *'to take its decisions effectively, to discharge the business and responsibilities of the council successfully, and to provide for effective community leadership and representation'*.
3. The Member Working Group of the Council's Standards & General Purposes Committee has spent some considerable time considering the data that has informed the Council size template and sets out below the Group's thinking and recommendations on the Council's requirements in the 3 areas that the LGBCE seeks to understand: strategic leadership, accountability and community leadership.
4. In setting out the Options below the Member Working Group has been mindful that the size of the Council must be sufficient to ensure that the Council can fulfil its statutory functions; but also it is of a size that ensures it is effective, and Councillors are enabled to make a meaningful and purposeful contribution to the Council's political leadership.
5. The paper sets out the Member Working Group's key considerations in their analysis of the various issues to determine the appropriate Council size, and what weight should be given to those considerations. A number of options are examined with a view to how and whether they meet these key considerations. Whilst there are number of options, there are two distinct models used. The first model starts from a proposed number and align the Council's arrangements. Option 1 references a size with from benchmarking data taken from data in 2014 and more recent existing or proposed unitary councils, and Option 2 reviews the number as proposed in the former County Council's unitary business case. The second model could be characterised as a 'workload' model, which provides an analysis of the demand on Councillors in undertaking their role which varies depending on the number of elected Councillors. 3 options of differing size are considered under this second model.

Key Considerations

6. It is worth noting that that the total number of Council positions in the legacy Councils amounted to 236. 34 of those positions were held by dual-hatters (ie, they were elected for both the district and county councils) giving a total number of elected Councillors as 202. 8 of the original cohort of Members no longer hold positions so the current number of Buckinghamshire Councillor is 194. As from May 2021 it is anticipate that the number of 147 will come into effect.
7. The Working Group have been set the task to review the appropriate number of Councillors for Buckinghamshire Council. The case for the new Unitary Council was accepted by the Secretary of State. The decision was to create an initial Council due to be elected in 2020 now 2021 of 147 Councillors and following that decision the proposal of 98 made in the original case fell away. The Working Group consider that their role, in the absence of any other confirmed or adopted number, was to start from 147 Councillors and review fully the number of Councillors for the Buckinghamshire Council, looking at all factors that impact the decision afresh.
8. The Member Working Group consider that a sustainable workload for any unitary Councillor is important whilst retaining links with the community so that Councillors are able to work in partnership with Parish and Town Councils in particular, but also with a whole range of other bodies. These links have been key during the Covid-19 crisis and will continue to be in the recovery period, which will now include the redevelopment of Buckinghamshire's town centres.
9. The fundamental choice will be to (a) keep the Committee structure unchanged or (b) to reconsider size and frequency of meetings, particularly the size and nature of the Community Boards. It is inevitable that elements of the structure will change and new Committees or working groups will form looking at areas of the Council's functions - like the Buckinghamshire Local Plan, for example. The main Committee Structure is considered robust and will need to be as the Council fits all the parts together.

The Council's Changing Agenda

10. The Member Working Group has reviewed the earlier considerations of the Council size as set out in the reports undertaken in support of the proposal to reorganise local government within Buckinghamshire. The Group notes that those reports were commissioned in 2014 and 2016 and considers that the Council's agenda has changed significantly during that time and, consequently, as has the demands on Councillors. That changing agenda has included the following:
 - (a) Covid: it has become trite to say that the pandemic has been unprecedented but the demands on the public sector generally, but also on local authority front-line services specifically, has been immense, particularly in the front-line social care functions. The Group consider that a post-Covid local authority will

require a thorough analysis of the role of local authorities and will inevitably require a reconsideration of the governance arrangements in place and an identification of service improvements and resources which will need heavy Councillor input and guidance to shape the delivery of services to their communities.

- (b) The environment: the climate change agenda has radically changed in the last 5 years with Councils, including Buckinghamshire, signing up to a radical reduction in carbon emissions and the development of a climate change strategy requiring significant changes to the way in which the Council does its business. Again, close oversight, accountability and strategic direction will be required by Councillors to succeed in this critical area of work. In addition, the Council's ambitious infrastructure projects, including the construction of highways, housing growth and the rebuilding of town centres (in part suffering from the economic effects of the pandemic) are all critical matters that the future Council will be concerned with at least for the next 10 to 15 years.
- (c) Large infrastructure projects: given Buckinghamshire's location and it being one of the regions of the UK with the highest productivity, it has been the focus of a number of planned infrastructure proposal. The biggest infrastructure project facing the Council is the HS2 project impacting on a swathe of communities throughout Buckinghamshire. As well as the formal process of Councillor consultation on the activities of HS2 there are innumerable issues and concerns raised by communities relating to construction traffic, highway diversions, noise, protestors, to name a few. As well as impacting on casework for many years to come, it is considered that Member involvement will continue and increase during the lifetime of this project. In addition to HS2 the Government's East-West Rail Project seeks to establish a significant and much-needed transport infrastructure connecting communities between Oxford through to Cambridge, impacting on large parts of Buckinghamshire. Alongside this, Highways England have advanced plans for a proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. Although this is currently paused, proposals are being developed for road projects that will support the Government's ambitions for the region. These large-scale projects will facilitate very significant housing growth in the area, bringing new communities and extending other local communities which will inevitably place additional burdens on the elected Membership of the Council.

Allowances & Savings

11. The determination of the appropriate allowances for Councillors is informed by the Independent Review Panel. The IRP considers a range of factors including: benchmarking data, surveys, specific demands on Councillor time, whether the allowance is sufficient compensation to those who might be foregoing paid employment.

12. At the last review in January 2020, the IRP recommended that it review Councillor allowances before 2024 and any changes before that next review should match those paid to officers.
13. It is acknowledged that a smaller number of Councillor overall will likely result in financial savings. Using the current figure given for the basic allowances for Buckinghamshire Councillors by way of an indicative example, the financial costs range is:

 $147 \times \text{£}13,000 = \text{£}1,911,000$ (post May 2021)
 $120 \times \text{£}13,000 = \text{£}1,560,000$
 $95 \times \text{£}13,000 = \text{£}1,235,000$
14. The basic Member allowance for the 87 Councillors in Cornwall in 20/21 is :
£14,870.50 (total: £1,293,734); for the 98 Councillors in Wiltshire for 20/21 is:
£13,833 (total: £1,355,634).
15. The delivery of the £18m unitary savings included a saving of £635,000 from the legacy council allowances budgets. The savings achieved from the reduction of the number of Councillors arising from the formation of the unitary Council was £156,000.
16. The budget for allowances set out in the unitary business case was £1.4m, assuming a basic allowance of £14,000 for 98 members. The Council has put this saving on hold pending the electoral review.
17. Any changes in the number of Councillor will likely trigger a reconsideration by the IRP who will consider those factors that Councillor will want to emphasise. It is clear that savings would be a factor that would inform the determination of an appropriate allowance, and, as the IRP is advisory, it would be a matter from the new Council to follow or depart from any recommendation should they be concerned to achieve the savings originally envisaged.
18. However, the Member Working Group does not consider that the number of Councillors should be dictated by an undue concern about the costs of allowances and that it was more important to ensure that local communities had a Council that met their needs and could represent their interest appropriately.

Representation

19. Another key consideration of the Group was to ensure that the Council had strong representation from across Buckinghamshire, but also to not create committees that lack focus, or prevent detailed discussion and debate by making them too large. Some committees may be able to reduce in size if experience dictates this is right, while others due to workload and the number of working groups, may need to increase.

20. One example is the Local Planning Committee. Each Committee requires enough members so that at times when an interest is declared a balanced number of Councillors remain. Though some may suggest increasing numbers for these Committees the Member Working Group consider that even at the current 197 Councillors it would be difficult to find the numbers who would wish to take on this specialist and 'heavy-lifting' role. Currently all wards are not represented on these committees and nor should this be envisaged in the future.
21. Enabling Members from across the Council to serve on main committees is also considered important for the unitary Council so as to maintain a balance of representation from all parts of the Council's geographical areas. This would require the development of significant detailed knowledge for each Member if they are to play a full part in the business of the Committee and any additional working groups.
22. Furthermore, given the size the majority political group on the Council the proportionality rules mean that significant reductions in the size of committees could result in some groups or parties not being represented. At present, and pending the May 2021 elections, a committee would be need to have 11 Members to have the 3 main political groups represented.

Casework

23. It is difficult to judge the level of casework, local issues and queries that will correlate to size of the Council, but by reducing the number of Councillors significantly without further support the Member Working Group consider that this would increase proportionately.
24. From the calculations attached the average hours that will be spent by Councillors will increase to 32 hours a week, an increase from the current 21 hours, a change of 52%. These hours are significant with the baseline well above the 16 hours initially estimated.
25. The concern with reducing the number of Councillors significantly would be an increase in meetings, and an increase in casework. The modelling suggests that these estimated hours extends to the limits what Councillors can achieve. This reduction in engagement would cut across a key commitment to residents. As already stated, workload is a significant factor if those with other commitments are to be encouraged to make up a significant number of Buckinghamshire's Members.
26. It is acknowledged that time Councillors devote to casework is very much dictated by the particular demands of a locality. The type and nature of the issues in a rural community differ from those in more urban areas, but Members considered that the frequency and volume of matters that those in more rural wards had to address (fly tipping, planning enforcement, flooding, highway related matters, HS2) matched those of their counterparts in larger conurbations where often the focus was on social welfare issues, anti-social behaviour, support for the vulnerable etc.

Community Boards

27. The Member Working Group acknowledge that Community Boards account for a significant commitment of Councillors' time. In the future the Council needs to review attendance at the 16 Community Boards after the boundary changes and ensure that no Councillor covers more than one Community Board. Each Community Board equals 15 meetings a year, for example Penn Wood and Old Amersham ward currently has three Community Boards in its area. This equates to 45 meetings a year and is not sustainable alongside other local commitments, including the attendance at Parish Councils.
28. Community Boards are a major platform for local engagement of the new Buckinghamshire Council and to be successful needs commitment from all the Local Councillors. The concern is that if the number of Councillors reduce the workload will increase further, requiring members to be part of most focused working groups created by the Community Board. The Group acknowledge the Community Boards are in their initial phase and have developed with their own distinct autonomy and character. They will need to develop further with the likely resumption of face to face engagement with residents. However, the vision for these Boards should not be limited to just a forum for debate and consultation but could stimulate direct action in localities.
29. Annex 1 is a document 'Introducing Community Boards' which set out the Council's approach to the Community Boards, including their purpose, membership, budget and operating principles alongside how they are supported by officers.
30. Community Boards have now been in operation for 9 months of the new Council's existence and have been well-received amongst Councillors and their communities. As well as providing direct input into community leadership, the Boards have been involved in critical projects ranging from Climate Change to community resilience and health and well-being. For much of 2020 the Boards have provided vital support to the vulnerable in their communities during Covid-19. Annex 2 is a set of slides from a recent presentation on how Boards are working in practice, the projects that they are involved in and how they are making an impact on their communities and the Council – together with how Councillors are involved with them.
31. Buckinghamshire has 169 Parish and Town Councils with many Members regularly attending a number of Parishes in their area. The Council has committed itself to a comprehensive Charter outlining its commitment to localities through this Charter (Annex 3). This Charter has been co-produced with Parish & Town Councils and has been widely circulated for consultation. Community Board alignment with Parish & Town Councils was considered a significant benefit and facilitated a forum where issues of mutual interest could be raised and, where appropriate, resources and assistance could be aligned without trespassing on Parish & Town Council responsibilities and duties. This was in addition to getting good, local responses and input into Council decisions.

32. Notwithstanding the evident time commitment, the Member Working Group were of the view that significant attendance and engagement will continue to be required by Councillors. The Community Boards have large delegated budgets, and scope for offering grants to local groups through a range of sub-committees. This involves a lot of extra work on matters that are of considerable importance to local communities.

Scrutiny

33. It was an ambition of the unitary Council as articulated in the former County Council's business case, that the new Council have robust scrutiny arrangements to ensure transparency and accountability.

34. The Working Group acknowledge that the Council is a very complex organization with, for example, over 1700 property assets and trading estates which raised £10-12m p.a. in revenue. It was important to have Councillor oversight of the this work both to ensure democratic accountability but also to utilize the specific skills that Members had.

35. The current arrangements for Scrutiny provide for:

- Children & Education
- Health & Adult Social Care
- Transport, Economy, Climate Change
- Communities & Localism
- Growth, Infrastructure & Housing
- Finance & Resources (including Budget Scrutiny Inquiry)

36. These have a wide-ranging remit and are involved in detailed analysis of Cabinet proposals. They have extensive work programmes and the respective Chairman meet regularly with relevant Cabinet Members and Directors to consider how they can remain effective and add value to the Council. They currently have 15 Members reflecting a broad representation from a range of Members and political groups.

37. The Council has a large Scrutiny function forged out of a commitment to invest in a culture of challenge and improvement. The model adopted allows the Select Committees to broadly align with the political portfolios of the Cabinet and so hold Cabinet Members to account on a wide range of issues, seen as essential given the significant change agenda for Buckinghamshire. The current size of the committees is proportionate to the total number we currently have. Another option would be to reduce membership size, to say, 10 and have the option of co-opting external stakeholders onto the committees where appropriate. Reducing the number of committees is also an option but having fewer than 5 would limit the work programme. As well as the 'challenge and improvement role' the Member Working Group were also keen to involve Councillors in the role of policy formation as a way of non-Executive Members being able to influence the development of key decisions.

38. It is considered that alternative approaches – such as one committee commissioning smaller task and finish groups, or broader committees covering, say, people and place – would similarly not have the capacity to cover the significant work programme.
39. The rationale for the current approach follows the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's guidance – The Good Scrutiny Guide. That sets out the principles of good scrutiny: (1) critical friend challenge (2) hearing the voice of the public (3) independence (4) drive improvement. It is considered that the current approach to Scrutiny fulfils those principles as well as the broader values of accountability, transparency and involvement.

Strategic involvement

40. Members need to have the time to engage with the development of the strategy and the big picture for the Council as this is where the largest area of delivery, and impact is made on the community by the Council. Each Member needs to have time to input into the major areas of work for the Council and the thinking that goes behind that delivery. Through their involvement of with Committees and sub-committees, Councillors are keen to influence the development of Local Plans, affordable housing etc. A lower number of Councillors would run the risk of leaving the key areas of responsibility to the Executive and Officers with very little input from Members. The Member Working Group want a Member-led Council and the number of Councillors will be the defining element of this.
41. At paragraphs 27 – 31 is a reference to the work of the Community Boards. In addition to being a key focus of community leadership, the Boards also feed into strategic decisions making as is evident from slides attached at Annex 2 and the way in which the Boards acts as both the way in which Council delivers its priorities at a local level, but also feeding back key issues from communities which inform the strategic direction of the Council.
42. Furthermore, many Members are formally involved with the Council's key strategic partners, for example, holding key appointments on the Health & Wellbeing Board and the Fire Authority as well as regular involvement with bodies such as the Clinical Commissioning Group, Buckinghamshire Business First and the Local Enterprise Partnership. To ensure continued and meaningful participation in these strategic partners it is considered essential that there are sufficient Councillors with sufficient availability.
43. In addition, the Council and its Committees has been keen to establish working groups to consider key aspects of the Council business. The Member Working Group for the Electoral Review is a case in point, but additional Group have been formed to look at the Constitution, HS2, the Council's Highways Maintenance Contract to name a few.

44. The Group were also aware that Councillor not only have a lot of experience and knowledge of their local communities, but their involvement in the regulatory work of the Council – eg, planning, licensing – requires a degree of specialism only acquired with good training and over a period of time.
45. Immersion in the detail of that work is considered critical to be able to ensure competent and lawful decisions however it is acknowledged that that commitment impacts on Councillor time.

Meeting arrangements

46. Having a larger number of Councillors does raise the difficulty of running the Full Council meeting where all members attend. Larger numbers make this more difficult and would require the procedures for the meeting being reviewed to ensure that questions could be asked and motions debated fully. This is not impossible to fix with learning from other Councils of a similar size.

Council size - Options

Option 1

47. Table 1 identifies recently established unitary councils alongside the relative projected population size for their area and either their actual, or proposed Councillor number. The most obvious comparators for Buckinghamshire is: Cornwall with a projected population size of 449,000, with 89 Councillors; West Northants – 441,000 population and 93 Councillors; Wiltshire with 417, 000 population and 98 Councillors.

48. Whilst there are other Councils (eg, Durham) with a similar population size which have 120+ Councillors, the decisions of the LGBCE in the last 10 year have been significantly lower than that number. Birmingham, for example, have a projected population of over 813,000 and have reduced their size to 101 Members. Other recent decisions for Unitary Councils have not been over 100 Members.

Authority	Total electorate (at time of review)	Forecast electorate	Proposed Wards	Proposed Council size	Area (sq mi)	Average electors per councillor (at time of review)	Average electors per councillor (forecast)	Last review date
BCP	301,183 (2018)	309,792 (2023)	33	76	62.3	3,963	4,076	2018
Birmingham	728,730 (2015)	813,981 (2021)	69	101 (-19)	103.4	7,215	8,059	2016
Buckinghamshire	419,552 (2019)	427,057 (2026)	49	120 (-27)	604	2,854	3,496	2021
Cornwall	425,514 (2016)	449,182 (2023)	87	87 (-36)	1,375	4,891	5,163	2018
Dorset	295,195 (2018)	308,050 (2023)	52	82		3,600	3,757	2018
Durham	407,527 (2011)	411,788 (2016)	63	126	859	3,234	3,268	2011
North Northants	343,614 (2018) (population)		26	78	380.9	3,186	4,405	N/A
West Northants	401,996 (2018) (population)		31	93	531.8	3,186	4,322	N/A
Wiltshire	367,686 (2018)	417,228 (2024)	98	98	1,346	3,752	4,257	2019

Table 1

49. On the basis of the recent previous decisions of the LGBCE alone, it could be argued that the appropriate size for Buckinghamshire falls within a range of 87 to 98 Members. Taking that as a starting point inevitably requires a review of what can reasonably be expected of Councillors in terms of meeting attendance and size of committees whilst still ensuring that the Council met its statutory functions and Members played a purposeful role.
50. Recently the Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government confirmed that 3 further unitary proposals could go forward for approval: Somerset, North Yorkshire and Cumbria.
51. As a further comparator, Table 2 below identifies the proposed number of Councillors together with the associated electorate, and electors per Councillor for these new authorities. (It should be noted that these numbers are proposals and these Councils will be subject to an electoral review before the final number is determined.)

Council	Cllr Number	Electorate	Electors per Cllr
North Yorks	90	?	6850
Somerset	100	430,171	4302
Cumbria	84	392,191	4669

Table 2

52. These newly proposed authorities suggest that an appropriate range for a similar sized electorate might extend the Council size to 100 Members.
53. The published unitary proposal for Somerset, as an example, acknowledges that there is a risk with a smaller number of Councillors of a democratic deficit, this risk can be mitigated by appropriate representations on their Local Area Committees and significant delegations to their many (218) Town and Parish Councils. All the authorities' proposals acknowledge consolidating the number of Councillors requires a detailed consideration of appropriate officer support and assistance to enable them to fulfil their role.
54. By way of a further comparison Table 3 below sets out a comparison of the number of Committees that non-executive Member sit on, using data from Buckinghamshire's current frequency and size of Committee meetings. This gives an indication of how decision-making arrangements might need to change if the number of Councillors were reduced to below 100.

	Wiltshire		West Northants		Cornwall		Bucks	
	Frequency	Size	Frequency	Size	Frequency	Size	Frequency	Size
Scrutiny	6 - 8	13 - 15			6	15	5	15
Area Planning	10 - 15	8 - 11			12	13 - 15	12	12
Audit	5	12			6	8	2	12
Licensing	5	12			4	15	5	15
Community Boards	5 - 8	3 - 9			4	4	2 - 4	6 - 27

Table 3

55. Whilst Scrutiny, Area Planning Committees, Audit and Licensing are broadly comparable in terms of frequency of meeting and size, it is notable that there is a considerably fewer Members who attend Community Boards/Community network meetings. Cornwall have a total of 19 Community Network Panels. (It is assumed that attendance on outside bodies and Parish & Town Council meetings would also be broadly comparable across the Councils considered.)

56. The Member Working Group acknowledge that the LGBCE assessment of what is the appropriate size Council for Buckinghamshire will not be based on comparator data but will be considered on the criteria set out in paragraphs 2 and 4 above. However, the Working Group noted that the earlier proposals regarding Council size had been based on a comparison of similar Councils and gave a context to the earlier size proposals. The Working Group further noted the more recent decisions of the LGBCE. Having regard to the comparator data has led the Working Group to consider further why Buckinghamshire Council distinguishes itself from the way in which other Council's would fulfil the criteria of strategic leadership, accountability and community leadership, as outlined in the key considerations above and the recommendations below.

Ernst & Young proposal

57. In 2014, Buckinghamshire Business First, on behalf of the business community in Buckinghamshire, commissioned Ernst & Young to develop a strategic business case for the reorganisation of local government in Buckinghamshire. Whilst undertaken some 6 years ago, the context for the Ernst & Young report was *'on-going reductions in the amount of resources Councils have to deliver services and increased demand ... [predicated to] result in a national funding gap of £16.5 billion by 2020. Our own analysis demonstrates that by 2016, without intervention, the funding gap in Buckinghamshire could reach £40m per year'*.

58. Due to the efforts of the legacy Councils the anticipated concern regarding the funding gap did not materialise although there remain some uncertainties over the future funding of local authorities with only a short-term financial settlement outlined by Government. Post Covid-19 there is the real possibility that local government is likely to face similar on-going reductions in funding.

59. The focus of the Ernst & Young report is the savings that could result from reorganising local government, including savings attached to a single unitary which was ultimately approved by Government. It was hoped at the time that with the harmonisation of Council Tax this would result in reduced Council Tax payments for residents. The report further maintained that a unitary Council would bring other tangible benefits, such as: (a) having a greater strategic impact with simpler organisational structures (eg, a unified planning authority; a single housing strategy) which would contribute to an enhanced economy; (b) having a greater locality focus by abolishing municipal boundaries in favour of natural communities alongside a simpler delivery model for services ; and (c) having a greater opportunity to develop more local democratic accountability.
60. Appendix 2 to the EY report addresses council size. Factors considered at that time were: the ratio of electors to Councillors; benchmarking data from other authorities; unique features of Buckinghamshire; and LGBCE guidance.
61. Of note is that, in EY’s view, the benefits to be derived from a unitary Council could be achieved with a relatively low number of Councillors. The report does not analyse the detail of the likely anticipated number of Committees, or Councillor’s time commitment, but it does include comparisons with other Councils on a range of measures, including electorate size; electors per Councillor and geographical area.
62. Table 4 set out a comparison by electorate size placing Buckinghamshire in the upper quartile of authorities nationally.

Comparison of prospective size with other Unitary Councils

With an electorate of approaching 400,000 Buckinghamshire is toward the upper quartile in terms of size nationally, though it is by no means the biggest council as the table below sets out.

Authority Name	Total Electorate	Council Size	Electors per Councillor	Council Type
Leeds	537,163	99	5426	Unitary District
Cornwall	409,639	123	3330	Unitary County (2009)
Durham	403,742	126	3204	Unitary County (2009)
Sheffield	399,131	84	4752	Unitary District
Manchester	380,930	96	3968	Unitary District
Wiltshire	357,240	98	3645	Unitary County (2009)
Bradford	350,882	90	3899	Unitary District
Liverpool	325,125	90	3613	Unitary District
Bristol	324,584	70	4637	Unitary District
Kirklees	313,233	69	4540	Unitary District

Table 4

63. Table 5 below shows a comparator for democratic representation for single-tier councils outside London. The red line identifies the range of electors per Councillor based on electorates of 400,000.

In terms of democratic representation, the scatter diagram below sets out ratio for all single-tier councils in England outside London. Based on the line of best fit, each option has been included with the lower and upper figures set out below.

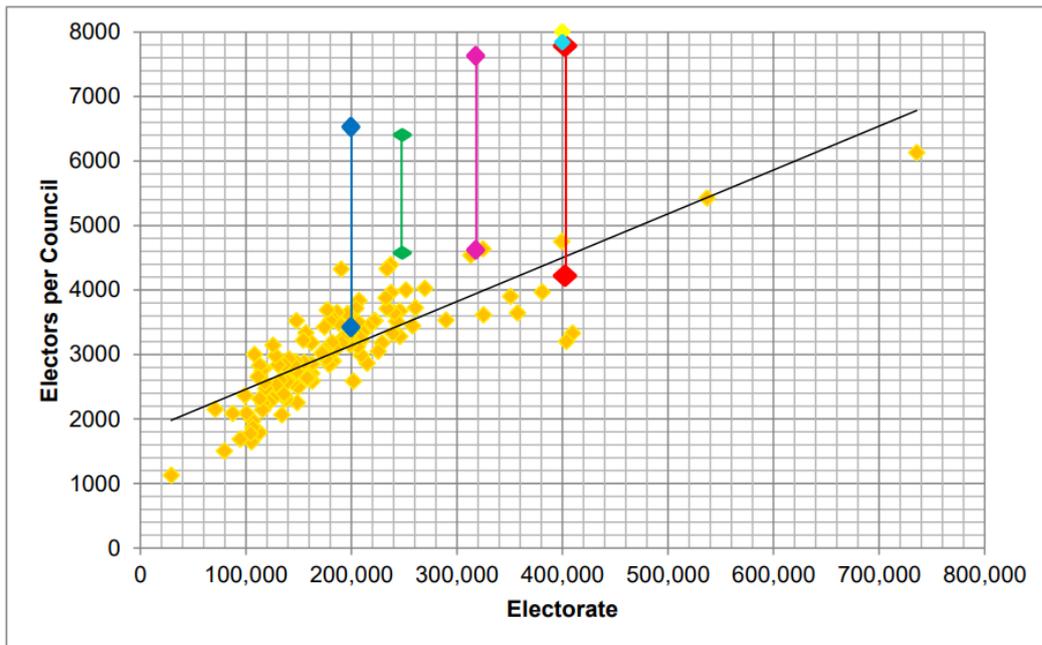


Table 5

Table 6 show the number of Councillor relative to geographical size.

Authority Name	Area in Hectares	Council Size	Hectare per Councillor	Council Type
Northumberland	501,300	67	7482	Unitary County
Cornwall	354,594	123	2883	Unitary County
Wiltshire	325,535	98	3322	Unitary County
Shropshire	319,731	74	4321	Unitary County
East Riding Of Yorkshire	240,763	67	3593	Unitary District
Durham	222,605	126	1767	Unitary County
Herefordshire	217,973	58	3758	Unitary District
Cheshire East	116,637	82	1422	Unitary District
Cheshire West & Chester	91,664	75	1222	Unitary District
North Lincolnshire	84,631	43	1968	Unitary District
Central Bedfordshire	71,567	59	1213	Unitary District

Table 6

64. Noting that 'an indicative 65 member council would put Buckinghamshire nearer the mean of single tier upper tier councils outside London in terms of the ratio of councillors and area'.

65. But considering the factors of electorate size, democratic representation and geographical areas, the report's conclusion is that *'the optimal size of a future unitary authority in Buckinghamshire would be between 65 and 80 elected members'*.
66. A copy of the EY report is at Annex 4.
67. **Summary:** benchmarking data from comparable size Councils from the (historic) data in the EY report, from decisions of the LGBCE on unitary Councils in the recent past and on the newly proposed unitary authorities in 2020 suggests the appropriate number of Councillors could be set at below 100, within a range from 65 – 100.
68. It is the view of the Member Working Group that taking the benchmarking data alone as the basis of determining the appropriate size does not adequately address the workload that will fall to a smaller number of Councillors and greater delegations to Parishes or officers is not considered compatible with a Member-led authority. There is also insufficient consideration given to the democratic deficit that will arise by having fewer Councillors and smaller committees.

Option 2 – Unitary Proposal

69. *Modernising Local Government in Buckinghamshire* was published in September 2016 and set out the business case for a single unitary Council for Buckinghamshire. Reference is made to the earlier EY report throughout. The 2016 Report was the proposal formally approved by Government. The business case set out the aims for Buckinghamshire with a vision for single tier of local government that: had a single voice; was more local; had better public services and provided better value for money, as well as contributing to public sector reform more generally with other partners.
70. The detailed report set out the drivers for change and the way a unitary Council would be well-placed to meet future challenges, including a greater level of annual revenue savings, a single accountable body to the public and the delivery of a comprehensive offer to communities.
71. The business case sets out in some detail the blueprint for a new single unitary Council including the governance arrangements. As proposed, the business case envisaged that local Members would play a pivotal role between the Council and residents, with the Council providing the necessary support for their expanded community leadership role. Engagement with Community Boards, town and parish Councils would become an important part of the role of a unitary Councillor. Training and development, digital and ICT and administrative support were seen as enabling Councillors to meet the demands of their role and to make it 'as easy as possible for those with full-time day-time commitments to serve as an elected councillor' meetings would be arranged appropriately.
72. For the transition period to the new unitary it was proposed that the number of Councillors would be 98. The business case acknowledged that this was higher than the number set out in the Buckinghamshire Business First/EY report offering a more

straightforward approach in terms of a boundary review *'and would also ensure sufficient capacity to lead the council during a period of transformation'*.

73. The report acknowledges that the dividing of the County Council's 49 divisions into two would create 98 single Member wards was a simple way to achieve the reduction. It would also mean reducing the Councillor number by 138 and contributing a £1.2 million saving, which would increase to a saving of £1.6 million with a reduction in the number of overall committees and support. (This would appear to be a similar approach in the newly proposed unitary Council for Cumbria where the adoption of (in their case) 1 Unitary Member for each of the County wards was seen as the simplest and most administratively convenient arrangement with the advantage of making significant savings.)
74. Appendix 3 of the business case gives more detail on the proposed governance model. There are 8 guiding principles in determining the governance arrangements for the new unitary Council reflected in the report. These are:
- Representation of all communities
 - Transparent and open decision-making
 - Responsiveness to the needs and ambitions of local communities
 - Accountability to local residents, communities and businesses
 - Robust assurance and regulation of the use of public funding and assets
 - Scrutiny of services
 - Strong partnership
 - Civic leadership and pride in Buckinghamshire which respects values of local communities and heritage
75. In terms of decision-making, there is a strong emphasis on consultation and that local Councillors and Community Boards are properly consulted on proposals that have a local impact and that communities are able to inform area and strategic planning decisions.
76. To realise these aspirations, it was proposed that the structure and composition of the key Committees would be as follows:
- 10 Cabinet Members (for the first term; fewer for a 'steady state')
 - 5 Strategic Scrutiny Committees (supplemented by the local scrutiny by the Community Boards)
 - Strategic Sites and 5 Area Planning Committees
 - Regulatory Committees – pensions, licensing, senior appointments, audit
 - 19 Community Boards
77. A copy of the former Buckinghamshire County Council business case for the unitary Council is at Annex 5.

78. **Summary:** extensive consideration was given by the former County Council as to the appropriate decision-making arrangements that the unitary Council should adopt with an emphasis on strong relationships with local communities and robust scrutiny and accountability. Whilst no detail was provided as the size of the key Committees, each Councillor was eligible for appointment on decision-making Committees and Community Boards.
79. The Member Working Group applaud the vision in 2016 for the unitary Council, however, in the line with the comment on Option 1, the post-April 2020 reality for Councillors is a heavy workload to facilitate and bring into effect that original vision. It is considered that the desire to ensure robust scrutiny, proper accountability, and good relationships with localities requires a higher number of Councillors than that originally envisaged in the County Council model. The Working Group also were of the view that the 2016 business case had advocated a number of changes and, also, savings arising from a reduction in the number of Councillors; however, since then the landscape for public authorities had changed significantly. The pandemic has meant a rethink of the role of public authorities generally, but in addition the reality of the obligations on Councillors in undertaking the work of unitary Council (the Community Boards is one example) was significantly underestimated and the original proposal for 98 Councillors was considered unrealistic.

The Workload Model

80. This model envisages 3 options ranging from 90 – 140 Councillors as an appropriate size for the Council. In Annex 6 to this Options Paper is a set of calculations which provide a broad outline of the workload and commitment required of Councillors currently and sets out three options with alternative numbers.
81. The key considerations that have informed Options 3 – 5 are as follows:
- Councillors should be drawn from the widest range of backgrounds, ages, knowledge and experience to better represent the communities served.
 - The amount of time required to become a Councillor should not be at a level that is prohibitive, particularly for those who are employed or in a caring role, or just wish for a balanced life. It should not be considered a full-time role.
 - Councillors should come from the community and be part of the community (local government should be local) and a Councillor needs to be accessible to their residents when issues arise, and not remote. It was considered that the establishment of the unitary Council the number of 147 Councillors was deemed an appropriate number where this connection could be maintained as a first step in the amalgamation of all the councils.
 - The Cabinet needs to be held to account by the Members through its Committees and with an appropriate level of Scrutiny. There needs to be enough Councillors to cover the current core structure and, where the need arises, to create additional Committees to cope with future challenges facing Buckinghamshire.

- The Cabinet will be made up of ten members, but some portfolios will need Deputies to assist due to the scale of the role. In the main, these would be considered as a full-time commitment.
 - There is a concern that casework increases with the reduction of the number of Councillors. If this becomes too great then the ability for a Member to significantly play a part in building the strategy of the Council reduces, and more powers are delegated to Officer discretion. For the smooth running of the Council it is acceptable to delegate powers to the Officers, but this should be done out of choice, not necessity, and where it is appropriate.
 - Allowances will be reviewed taking into account the number of Councillors and be relative to the workload reducing additional cost.
 - If the number of Councillors was set at 120, this would equate to 3,500 electors per Councillor, a number projected to increase over the next few years, and in line with a number of comparable Unitary Councils.
82. The calculations and assumptions sheet in Annex 6 give three options, which gives an indication of the time commitment on Councillors depending on the Option chosen. Option 3 notes the impact on Councillor time-commitment if the number were fixed at 90. Option 4 envisages 120 Members, and Option 5 sets out the impact at 140 Members.
83. **Summary:** the work of Councillors is demanding but must be sustainable in order for it to be carried out effectively and so as to attract candidates for elected office from a diverse background. The modelling provided suggests that with a lower number of Councillors using current commitments there is a danger that the role will become unsustainable.
84. The Member Working Group were unanimously of the view that the new Council brought with it greater challenges on individual Councillor time and commitment and that to fulfil the original vision and realise the benefits of local government reorganisation for Buckinghamshire, and afford appropriate and proportionate representation for communities, the number of Councillors required was higher than originally envisaged. Accepting that a Council size had to be practically and administratively manageable, the Member Working Group considered that 120 Councillors would be the appropriate size.

Recommendation:

85. The Member Working Group have given close scrutiny to key considerations that ought to inform the Commissions determination of the appropriate size for the Council. Significant weight has been given to a range of issues which the Member Working Group consider will meet the Commissions requirement '*to discharge the business and responsibilities of the council successfully, and to provide for effective community leadership and representation*'. Those issues include the new Council's demanding agenda over the next few years; the Council's ambition to ensure involvement of communities through its Community Boards; the desire to have

accountability and transparency through its Select Committees and to ensure Councillors involvement in both the strategic and regulatory work of the Council.

86. Noting that the decisions of the Commission in the recent past have rarely exceeded the 100 number, having considered the feedback from Councillors and analysed the time demands in fulfilling their role in the new unitary Council, the Member Working Group consider that a higher number of Councillors is required to meet the objectives the Council has set for itself.
87. The Working Group has reviewed the information and the key considerations and have considered the hard evidence on key matters such as: the work of Cabinet Members, and the work on Committees, Community boards, Parish Councils, Casework, developing expertise, inputting into Strategy and the many other things that form part of the role of being an effective Councillor. To assist the decision-making they have evaluated metrics on how this role changes as Councillor numbers reduce. This has helped guide the Working Group towards a number and comparison of the options. The analysis demonstrate a number of tipping points in the work of a Councillor and the impact they can have, especially where the workload could act as a disincentive to younger working people and those with young families or acting as carers to take on this role. There is also the impact on the level of connection with local communities. The Working Group consider that a point would be reached where decisions are delegated not out of choice but through necessity. The analysis gives us an indication of these tipping points and although this cannot give a precise answer it does demonstrate a point differentiation. These tipping points significantly change what a Councillor can achieve for the community they serve.
88. Balancing the considerations as set out above the Member Working Group recommend that the Standards Committee should propose Option 4 (a number of 120) to the LGBCE as the appropriate Council size for Buckinghamshire Council.

END

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