

Council Agenda



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Date: 3 October 2023

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Summons to attend a meeting of Council

to be held on Wednesday 11 October 2023 at 7.00 pm
The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Arran".

Patrick Arran
Head of Legal and Democratic

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Agenda

Open to the public including the press

1. Apologies for absence

To record apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

(Pages 8 - 23)

To adopt and sign as a correct record the Council minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023.

3. Declarations of interest

To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and non-registrable interests or any conflicts of interest in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

4. Urgent business and chair's announcements

To receive notification of any matters which the chair determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the chair.

5. Public participation

To receive any questions or statements from members of the public that have registered to speak.

6. Petitions

To receive any petitions from the public.

7. Electoral Review of Vale of White Horse District Council - submission on council size

(Pages 24 - 49)

To consider the report of the head of legal and democratic on the Council Size Submission document.

8. Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

At the annual meeting Council appointed Councillor Lugova as a substitute member on the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Following Councillor Lugova's appointment to the Cabinet, she is no longer permitted to be a member of a scrutiny committee.

Council is therefore invited to make a substitute appointment to the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

9. Report of the leader of the council

To receive the report of the leader of council.

10. Questions on notice

To receive questions from councillors in accordance with Council procedure rule 33.

A. Question from Councillor Rayner to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council

Rural bus services should be the lifeblood of our community. Yet the growing community of Kingston Bagpuize has a completely inadequate bus service to Abingdon, our nearest town. Buses only run every two hours and only before 5.00pm. Public transport is essential for commuters, young people accessing education and training, for socialising in the evenings and supporting the local economy. It is also an equalities issue; older people, those who are unable to drive or afford a car, can struggle to visit the GP, dentists and do their shopping.

This council has previously stated our commitment to public transport and active travel, to reduce air pollution, parking problems and improve health, yet we seem to have limited power to make this a reality.

While this may be the case, could the Leader explain what is being done by other authorities and private bus companies to improve bus services between Kingston Bagpuize and Abingdon? And what more can be done, perhaps with the county council, to help our village secure a bus service that is fit for purpose?

B. Question from Councillor Smith to Councillor Coleman, Cabinet member for environmental services and waste

There is growing concern in my ward about the number of single use disposable vapes that are littering our streets and public spaces. People who want to ensure their used vapes are disposed of safely are not always sure of which bin to use and there is next to no information about returning used vapes to retailers.

What impact has the prevalence of single use vapes had on Vale services, and what is the council already doing to address this?

C. Question from Councillor de la Harpe to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council

Given that the Prime Minister has recently made announcements that it is his government's intent to roll back climate emergency initiatives and commitments, thereby making his target of hitting net zero by 2050 even less achievable, can the cabinet member assure residents that we remain committed to our climate emergency goals, explain how we might mitigate this new risk to our plans, and write to the Prime Minister to express our utter disappointment in his actions?

D. Question from Councillor Edwards to Councillor Pighills, Cabinet member for community health and wellbeing

Recently the dental practice in Faringdon has closed its doors to all NHS patients. This has caused great concern as it is the only practice in Faringdon and serves the residents of the town and many of the outlying villages in the Western Vale.

Could you clarify what influence the council could have in these circumstances and what if anything we can do to help improve the level of service in Faringdon and the rest of the district?

E. Question from Councillor Cooke to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council

Thames Water have now published their latest plans for the proposed mega-reservoir in the Vale. They appear to have ignored the many strong points raised that challenged the proposal and have increased the size of the reservoir from one hundred megatonnes to a hundred and fifty megatonnes of water.

The huge scale, massive disruption and lengthy timelines of the project mean that not a drop of water will be seen from the reservoir in a generation. Solutions that could be put in place rapidly, cheaply, and with minimal disruption, such as the National Water Grid, appear to have been sidelined.

The one positive in it is that they claim to be increasing work on cutting leaks. Thames Water currently loses the equivalent of the entire capacity of Farmoor reservoir every fortnight across their network.

Can the Leader tell us which meetings we will be able to have with Thames Water and what pressure will we be placing on them to listen and respond to our questions and respond to the issues, and whether we are able to speak directly to the new Leader of the Environment Agency to ensure that they are aware of the very strong objections from our residents?

F. Question from Councillor Katherine Foxhall to Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of the council and Cabinet member for climate action and the environment.

In response to an Environmental Information Request, submitted in my role as Nature Recovery Champion, Thames Water have shared data showing every single one of the sewage treatment works and storm overflows in the Vale (except Botley syphon at zero), has already exceeded the total 2021-2022 discharges. At the Wantage works, which discharges directly into the Letcombe Brook chalk stream north of Grove, we have already seen more than 250 hours released this year, five times the total recorded for the whole of 2022. In Drayton, which discharges into the Ginge Brook chalk stream, there had been 969 hours by 5 August, already nearly double the total for 2022. At Shrivenham, there has been 467 hours of discharge, already four times the entire total for 2022.

Disappointingly, Thames Water have also confirmed that they are only considering Abingdon, Kingston Bagpuize, and Wantage as “high priority” sites in the Vale as defined in the Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan, which requires improvement to 75% of storm overflows discharging into or near ‘high priority sites’ by 2035. This would leave, for example, the Shrivenham outfall to continue to discharge directly into the Tuckmill Brook, immediately upstream of the Tuckmill Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest (which Vale owns and is managed by volunteers) for another decade. It will also provide no protection to the Ginge Brook, which receives horrifying amounts of raw sewage from the Drayton works.

Does the Leader agree that Thames Water’s current performance, its investment strategy, and its long-term commitment to reduce the impact of sewage releases in the Vale are woefully inadequate? And is the council able to do more to ensure that precious local habitats such as Tuckmill Meadows and Ginge Brook, as well as the entire Thames Catchment in the Vale, can receive some protection?

11. Motions on notice

To consider motions from councillors in accordance with Council procedure rule 38.

(1) Motion to be proposed by Councillor Foxhall, seconded by Councillor Crawford:

Council’s Pay Policy Statement approved on 15 February 2023, ensures that all directly employed staff receive at least the Real Living Wage as annually defined by the Living Wage Foundation. The Real Living Wage is currently £10.90 an hour and will be updated on 24 October of this year.

The payment of at least the Real Living Wage to our employees is one way of ensuring that all our suppliers and residents are aware that we recognise the importance of the Real Living Wage in helping to reduce in-work poverty.

However, Council is currently unable to become accredited as a Real Living Wage employer as it does not have a clear commitment, or plan in place, to ensure that all the contracts it awards to third parties require that those companies are committed to paying,

as a minimum, the Real Living Wage.

All our major contracts are joint arrangements between Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Councils.

Whilst Council recognises that it cannot simply change existing contracts, requiring payment of at least the Real Living Wage is something we are able to address in future procurements and contracts.

To demonstrate its commitment to the Real Living Wage and secure accreditation as a Real Living Wage employer, Council confirms its belief that:

- no Council employee, or employee of its third party contractors, should be employed on less than the Real Living Wage.

Council therefore asks:

- 1 The Chief Executive to continue to engage with Unison, as the Council's recognised trade union, to ensure that this position is maintained going forward in respect of all employees.
- 2 The Chief Executive to prepare a report for Cabinet, outlining the steps that are required for our Council to secure accreditation as a Real Living Wage accredited employer.
- 3 The Chief Executive to include, within this report, proposals to implement a requirement on all future contracted providers to pay at least the Real Living Wage to all their staff throughout the duration of the contract, identifying any likely costs associated with this.
- 4 Cabinet to consider the report when prepared and, should its recommendations be approved by both South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse, authorise the Chief Executive to work with colleagues to implement its recommendations as soon as practicable.
- 5 The Chief Executive to bring to the attention of all existing third parties who currently provide services directly on behalf of the Council, our view that all employers should, as a minimum, pay the Real Living Wage to their staff and seek an update on their companies' position in relation to this matter.
- 6 The Chief Executive to update Council on progress towards its Accreditation as a Real Living Wage Employer when the next Annual Pay Policy Statement is brought before it.

(2) Motion to be proposed by Councillor Edwards, seconded by Councillor Cox:

Council notes that:

- A poll from Plan International reveals that over a quarter (28%) of girls aged 14-21 in the UK are struggling to afford period products, and nearly 1-in-5 (19%) report being unable to afford period products at all since the start of 2022.
- An ActionAid 2022 survey showed that of those who have struggled to afford menstrual products in the last six months, 75% said they had prioritised spending money on food, 49% had prioritised gas/electric, and 31% prioritised fuel.

- Women, girls and others who menstruate are at risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) if they do not have access to clean period products.
- There is significant evidence of the widespread adverse impact of periods on attendance in education and at work.
- Vulnerable people, such as asylum seekers, those fleeing domestic abuse and homeless people, can experience additional difficulty accessing sanitary products.

Council resolves to:

1. Work with local charities and community groups with the aim of making period products freely available in the Beacon, Abbey House and other buildings we own or operate, and to provide information at those locations on the options residents have available to them when accessing period products, including sustainable reusable options.
2. Encourage those in control of other public buildings in the district, such as GLL and the County Council, to consider doing the same.
3. Ask the Leader to write to the relevant Minister requesting them to introduce a legal right for people in England to access a choice of free period products, provide public health funding to help upper tier local authorities provide menstrual products in the public facing buildings under their control, and to give further consideration to how free period products can be made available to all those who might face barriers to accessing them.

Minutes of a meeting of the Council



held on Wednesday, 12 July 2023 at 7.00 pm
at The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Councillors: Sally Povolotsky (Chair), Kiera Bentley (Vice-Chair), Ron Batstone, Cheryl Briggs, Sue Caul, Robert Clegg, Mark Coleman, Andy Cooke, James Cox, Andy Crawford, Eric de la Harpe, Debra Dewhurst, Neil Fawcett, Andy Foulsham, Katherine Foxhall, Hayleigh Gascoigne, Jenny Hannaby, Sarah James, Diana Lugova, Patrick O'Leary, Viral Patel, Helen Pighills, Mike Pighills, Jill Rayner, Judy Roberts, Bethia Thomas and Richard Webber

Officers: Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, Simon Hewings, Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer, Janet Kealey, Solicitor - Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer and Mark Stone, Chief Executive

15. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Barrow, Edwards, Forder, Hallett, Houghton, Shaw, Skinner, Smith and Thompson

16. Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as correct records the minutes of the annual meeting of Council held on 17 May 2023 and the special meeting of Council held on 13 June 2023 and agree that the Chair sign them as such.

17. Declarations of interest

Councillor Foulsham declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in agenda items 8 and 9 due to a potential house sale relating to the schemes.

18. Urgent business and chair's announcements

Councillor Povolotsky, Chair of the council, provided a summary of events she and her vice-chair had attended. She reported the appreciation of the Lord-Lieutenant of Oxfordshire for the public service of members. She also thanked officers for the ongoing Induction Training Programme which had been useful and informative.

19. Public participation

Two members of the public had registered to ask a question as set out below.

- A. Mr Illingworth had submitted the following question to the Leader of the council but was unable to attend the meeting.

“This Council is currently contributing to the £120,000 cost of the review and update of the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, which is being led by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP).

In the past, the Strategic Economic Plan has been largely developed in a silo and signed off behind closed doors but has gone on to have significant impacts including influencing housing targets and the contents of Local Plans, as well as broader strategies such as transport.

In the light of our climate and biodiversity emergencies, we know a step-change is required in how we consider these issues. For example:

- The House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee states that behavioural change is essential for achieving climate and environment goals, and for delivering wider benefits;
- The BEIS Independent Net Zero Review, published on 13th January states, ‘None of this will happen without a step change in the government’s approach to delivering net zero’; and the
- Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map & Action Plan Final Report.

The size of the challenge to achieve net zero carbon by 2050 at latest will require a considerable step change in activity. We need to embed climate change into decision making across Oxfordshire’s local authorities.

But indications from the series of workshops led by OxLEP suggest that:

- The primary aim remains economic growth, with the environment, net zero and wellbeing featuring as issues to be managed rather than front and centre.
- The timetable appears to be focused on speed (getting it done and dusted by June initially, but now the autumn) which apparently does not allow time for public consultation.
- Overall, the level of engagement has been low and primarily focused on members of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, including the universities and OxLEP. There has been very little representation from the diverse Oxfordshire population, including those economic and socially disadvantaged communities that might be viewed as having the most to gain from a robust Strategic Economic Plan.

Given the above, can the Leader:

- a) Explain why the SEP review is being pushed through at such speed and without meaningful engagement with relevant communities?

b) Provide reassurance that the draft new Strategic Economic Plan will at the very least go through a full Scrutiny process and be brought to a full Council meeting for approval, prior to the Leader voting on it at an OxLEP Board Meeting?"

Councillor Fawcett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for strategic partnerships and place undertook to provide a written response.

B. Mr Salmons asked the following question of Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council:

"Residents living on Great Western Park, Didcot continue to endure the use of a site at the northern edge of the estate as a temporary construction compound by the developers and their subcontractors.

The use of the site for this purpose is not only an eyesore, but generates noise, dust, and smells which are detrimental to neighbouring residential uses. It also presents a risk to wildlife, including deer who are often seen clambering on piles of building waste stored precariously on the site. It is a far cry from the wildflower meadow approved for the site ten years ago.

The continued use also appears to be delaying the delivery of the long-overdue allotments immediately to the north of the site, as well as the approved landscaping arrangements for the wider area of public open space, which remains inaccessible to residents, despite many having purchased their homes over a decade ago.

The compound is clearly no longer reasonably required in connection with the Great Western Park development. The last homes were completed some time ago. Officers are aware, through their discussions with the developers, that at least some of the material stored on the site is intended to be used on a completely different development.

Documents obtained in response to a FOI request reveal the developers pleaded with the Council to have these areas of public open space adopted over a year ago. It appears even they no longer want this use to continue.

The issue has been raised multiple times with local Councillors, and formal allegations have been received by the Council, but Planning Officers have refused to take action, claiming there is no evidence of a planning breach.

Could the Leader of the Council clarify whether the Council's failure to take action on this matter is in any way related to the scandalous scheme this Council has been advancing alongside South Oxfordshire District Council to repurpose the site as a permanent grounds maintenance depot for its own use, for which the temporary use has been cited as an excuse?"

Councillor Thomas undertook to provide a written response to the question.

Four members of the public addressed Council in support of Motion B at agenda item 12 as detailed below:

- Matt Twiss, Chair of the Anderson Place Residents' Association.
- Carl Simpson, representing Jim French who was unable to attend the Council meeting – both residents of Anderson Place.

- Mark Bradfield, of Letcombe Brook Project.
- Gavin Attard, a resident of Steventon and member of GARD (Group Against Reservoir Development)

They made the following points:

- There were deficiencies in the planning system that, on the face of it, permit developers and utility providers to design, approve and construct what appears to be, non-compliant infrastructure.
- Housing development had given rise to significant public health and safety risks, actual raw sewage contamination and hefty ongoing costs for all current and future residents.
- Developers, planning and Thames Water all have a critical role to play to ensure that the correct infrastructure is put in place, from the outset, in order to eliminate all risk of sewage flooding incidents.
- Questioned whether the Pump Station at Anderson Place was built to the correct standards and what can be done to ensure that it is acceptable to be adopted by Thames Water.
- The Environment Agency had insufficient resources, due to budget cuts, to adequately monitor water quality.
- Existing sewage treatment works in Wantage did not have the capacity to deal with the existing population and, with increased house building and population growth, there was an urgent need for investment to upgrade the facility.
- Suitable planning conditions required to ensure sufficient capacity was added prior to building or occupation. Without such measures the water quality would continue to deteriorate causing environmental damage and a risk to public health.
- The parallel issue relating to lack of maintenance and investment was the leakage of supplied water – Thames Water has the largest percentage leak rate of any UK water company and only intend to reduce leakages in Oxfordshire by 14% by 2050 in contrast to a target of 50% across their area.

20. Petitions

None.

21. Update on the council's Information Technology infrastructure

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 3 July 2023, on the current discussions relating to the council's Information Technology Infrastructure.

RESOLVED: that a supplementary estimate of £326,000 be added to the 2023/24 revenue budget, funded as set out in the head of corporate services' report to Cabinet on 3 July 2023.

22. Delivery and management arrangements for council-provided Local Authority Housing Fund and Service Family Accommodation housing

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 3 July 2023, on the work being undertaken in relation to providing homes under Government

schemes – the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme and the Service Family Accommodation.

Cabinet supported progressing with the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) and Service Family Accommodation property schemes as a matter of urgency and necessity to support those most in need of the council's help. Under the LAHF scheme the council would receive government grant funding of approximately 40 per cent of the cost but would have to fund the remainder. However, the homes would then belong to the council.

RESOLVED: To proceed the allocation of a capital budget envelope of £2.5 million, being the council's share of the purchase costs of properties bought under the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme.

23. Local Authority Housing Fund 2

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 3 July 2023, on additional grant funding to support the council's refugee and general homelessness accommodation programme.

Cabinet supported the additional scheme which would further support the provision of housing for the council's refugee accommodation programme. However, unlike the first phase, the Local Authority Housing Fund 2 also allowed the council to utilise the accommodation for general homelessness use and would deliver a further four homes.

RESOLVED: to add £1.7 million to the approved capital programme, part funded by Local Authority Housing Fund 2 funding of £680,000 to purchase four homes under this scheme.

24. Report of the leader of the council

Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council, provided an update on a number of matters. The text of her address is available on the council's [website](#).

25. Questions on notice

A. Question from Councillor Emily Smith to Councillor Sue Caul, Cabinet member for affordable housing, development and infrastructure

Oxfordshire Community Land Trust (CLT) have worked with our council for around 15 years to bring forward Oxfordshire's first CLT housing scheme in Dean Court, Cumnor. Councillor Roberts, who worked for many years to push this scheme forward, and I were at the groundbreaking and in June at the opening. It is incredibly exciting to see the building almost finished and people from the Vale's housing register able to move into this truly affordable and low carbon housing. But it took such a long time to get to this point.

The Local Government Association is working with the national Community Land Trust and Localis on some research on how we can speed up the process and make it easier for CLT schemes, like the one in Dean Court easier to achieve, but local action and commitment is also required.

Could the Cabinet member confirm that Community Land Trust schemes will be supported by this administration, and what is being done locally to ensure more schemes like the wonderful Crofts Court can come forward more quickly in the Vale?

Response

I am delighted that the Vale was able to bring forward Oxfordshire's first CLT project. It is a fantastic project and will serve as a great exemplar for other community led schemes across the district.

On 11 November 2022, the Cabinet approved a new Housing Delivery Strategy and Action Plan (<https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/housing/housing-delivery-strategy/>) which outlines the approach to how new affordable housing will be delivered within the District.

One of the four priorities in the action plan is "valuing and supporting council and community led housing initiatives". This includes a number of actions to support and accelerate community led housing schemes. Specific actions in the plan include addressing the need for enhancing staff resources to ensure we have the specialist skills to support community led schemes, and also looking at community led housing policies as part of the development of our Joint Local Plan with South Oxfordshire District Council.

Alongside this the council is currently looking to improve its policy and process for awarding grant funding, made available by Section 106 monies, toward affordable housing. By having a better and clearer process we will encourage more bids from CLTs for funding that can support the delivery of new affordable homes.

B. Question from Councillor Debby Hallett to Councillor Neil Fawcett, Cabinet member for strategic partnerships and place

This council became a partner to the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme in 2014, under a different administration, when it was just an idea. Now, 8+ years later, when the details are clear, affected parishes in Vale have formally objected to the current plan. Thousands of objectors have signed a local petition (Save Hinksey Meadows) calling for a public inquiry on the scheme. Now that much more is known about the costs/benefits, environmental damage and transport disruption, what is council actively doing to protect our district's irreplaceable habitats in Hinksey Meadow and the quality of life of our residents?

Response

This council quite rightly agreed to become a partner in the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme in 2014, seven years after the devastating floods in 2007 which saw hundreds of homes flooded in the Vale and in Oxford and caused major disruption.

My own family was one of those affected by the flooding in Abingdon, resulting in us having to move into temporary accommodation for 11 months, disruption to work and our children's education and the loss of a number of irreplaceable items of sentimental value.

Reducing the likelihood of flooding, and its impact on local house and businesses, creates a long term improvement to our residents' quality of life. Based on my own experience, it is difficult to put a price on that.

But, as your question suggests, we have to balance those important benefits of any flood alleviation scheme, with any environmental disbenefits that arise from a scheme.

I am therefore glad to see that there is to be a public inquiry which will be run by Defra. This is not related to the local petition and is specifically in relation to the Compulsory Purchase Orders that are needed for the Environment Agency to secure access to the land for the flood scheme.

The public inquiry is standard procedure when objections are received, and this allows an independent inspector to hear the cases for and against the scheme before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State on whether or not the CPO should be confirmed.

The CPO inquiry has been expected for a long time and has been built into the project plans, so it is not a surprise. Indeed, I understand that the Environment Agency is confident in the scheme and welcomes the opportunity for a public discussion chaired by an independent inspector. The inquiry is expected to be held this autumn.

The decision on whether to grant planning permission is to be made by Oxfordshire County Council. In our representations we have explicitly asked for appropriate measures to be taken in regard to environmental matters including biodiversity net gain and protection of trees. We have also requested a construction management plan and we have sought to minimise the visual impact of the scheme upon the landscape.

For several years our officers, supported by successive leaders of the council and by other senior members, have been working closely with the Environment Agency on plans to mitigate the impacts of the scheme, both in its design and in the construction.

The Environment Agency has adjusted the scheme design to minimise the impact on MG4 grassland, and to keep construction noise and dust as far as possible away from existing settlements such as South Hinksey.

It will be for the inspector and the County Council in turn to decide whether the balance between the benefits of the future reduction in flooding outweighs any environmental disbenefits from the scheme.

Inevitably a major scheme such as this will be disruptive during the build period, and we will continue to lobby for the minimisation of disruption to local residents, particularly those in South Hinksey.

Once completed the scheme will provide greatly enhanced flood protection for hundreds of our residents and local businesses for many years to come. Furthermore, the scheme will create over 20 hectares of new wetland, linking to existing wildlife sites and helping to reverse the national decline in wetland habitats. Over time there will be new hedgerows and native deciduous woodland.

By working with the EA we have been able to influence the design and construction of the scheme and I look forward to continuing the positive partnership approach.

C. Question from Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne to Councillor Andy Crawford, Cabinet member for finance and property

I note that on 23 June, there was an agenda item on the Great Western Park GP surgery at the meeting of Vale's Cabinet. I'm glad the item was brought to Cabinet, but it was made confidential. This topic is important to the local public. What updates can be shared publicly as to the progress on the plans to provide a GP surgery on Great Western Park?

Response

I recognise the provision of the new GP surgery for Great Western Park is very important to local residents and as a council we endeavour to be as open and transparent about all our activities as we are able to. I am disappointed we were not able to make the report of 23 June public due to it being subject to the finalisation of commercially sensitive transactions, involving other parties. The decision by members to consider the report in private session was based on the advice of the council's Monitoring Officer.

A Communication and Engagement Plan has been prepared with input from all parties to establish a joint approach to proactive communications at the achievement of project milestones. This Plan has been shared with the ward councillors for Great Western Park.

The plan identifies stages and methods for updates to relevant stakeholders and members of the public, which includes the publication of updates to a joint webpage created by the Vale and Integrated Care Board (<https://express.adobe.com/page/TgSgyuAwwwuCp/>). This webpage contains the latest updates on the project and is continually reviewed to ensure the latest available information is made public.

Supplementary question and response

In response to a supplementary question seeking a timeline for when members of the public would receive the information, Councillor Crawford said that this would occur as soon as possible but that any release of information had to be agreed with all the parties including the developers and health sector.

D. Question from Councillor Mark Coleman to Councillor Helen Pighills, Cabinet member for community health and wellbeing

I was recently invited to a meeting which was focused on housing and the military; what the military provided, and what the district council's responsibilities were to families of serving personnel and those who have left the service at the end of their enlistment.

I would like to understand our responsibilities as a district council to residents, including their families, who have served in the armed forces and are leaving for other reasons, for example medical, administrative and disciplinary discharge. At the meeting, a spouse described her distress when her then husband was subject to disciplinary action, which resulted in his discharge from the service. She did not know where to turn for advice, or support, to find housing for her young family. Can you explain our position in these circumstances?

Response

The council is a signatory the Armed Forces Covenant (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1116148/Armed_Forces_Covenant_Duty_Statutory_Guidance.pdf) and the council recognises the principle that Armed Forces personnel and Veterans should not face disadvantages as a consequence of their service when applying to the Local Authority for housing.

The council's Housing Allocations Policy (HAP) contains several provisions that apply Armed Forces households. For example, the HAP provides that the rules around

“Local Connection” which can exclude applicants from the housing register are not applied to Armed Forces households in the districts. The council is able to award enhanced priority for housing to serving or former Armed Forces personnel who have suffered injury attributable to their service, as well as to bereaved spouses. In addition, the council awards priority to households being told to leave Service Families’ Accommodation (SFA) at an earlier point than would be the case in a civilian private tenancy. In cases of relationship breakdown within Armed Forces households (in which the serving household member often returns to reside in camp and the remaining household members receive a notice to leave their SFA) the council can work with the household under homelessness legislation to prevent their homelessness by assisting them into social or private rented accommodation and can provide emergency accommodation where this is unsuccessful.

The council’s Housing Needs team are therefore fully willing to offer support and advice for cases such as the one you have highlighted in your question.

E. Question from Councillor Katherine Foxhall to the Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of the council

In December 2022, Oxfordshire County Council paused the HIF2 (Housing Infrastructure Fund) road scheme between Witney and Oxford in response to escalating costs. Since then, inflation has remained high, and interest rates have risen five times, from 3% to 5%, with 6% an increasingly likely scenario. Moreover, in its report released on 28 June 2023 the government’s Climate Change Committee urged a systematic review of all current and future road-building projects, and to allow only schemes that “meaningfully support cost-effective delivery of Net Zero and climate adaptation to go ahead.”

Does the Leader believe that the HIF1 scheme around Didcot meets these criteria, and can she confirm that our District Council is being kept informed of any proposed major changes or re-scoping related to the delivery of the HIF1 roads scheme?

Given current financial pressures has she sought – or will she seek – assurances from OCC that elements of the plans to deliver active travel, public transport and environmental mitigation will be prioritised and their delivery guaranteed, and that serious contingency plans are being developed, and independent advice sought, in the best short and long-term interests of Vale’s residents and businesses?

Response

The government’s Climate Change Committee has recently made a recommendation that the Department for Transport (DfT) conducts a systematic review of current and future road-building projects to assess their consistency with the Government’s environmental goals. We wait to see whether the DfT will decide to undertake this review nationally, and it would be premature for me as District Council Leader to make a comment on how the HIF1 scheme would be evaluated against the criteria.

The HIF1 scheme is being led by Oxfordshire County Council and being funded by Homes England, the Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership and Oxfordshire County Council. According to OCC, the four separate elements that make up the HIF1 Didcot and surrounding areas project will provide more sustainable travel options in and around Didcot, as well as reducing a legacy of congestion in the surrounding villages and improving air quality and noise levels. The proposals include the A4130 widening, the Didcot Science Bridge, Didcot to Culham River crossing and the Clifton Hampden bypass. The scheme will provide 19.2 km of high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure and connect employment sites with Didcot, surrounding villages, existing walking, and cycling routes. Opportunities for more direct, faster and more reliable bus

routes will also be provided by the scheme. Eighteen new bus stops will increase the accessibility and catchment of the existing bus services in the area, whilst also helping to cater for new or improved services in the future. The additional bridge over the Thames will help cater for future north-south bus routes, which are currently impacted by congestion at the existing river crossings. It is also our understanding that the funding provided by Homes England can only be used on the specific scheme agreed with Homes England, that formed part of the initial OCC submission to Government.

HIF1 remains a vital and significant package of infrastructure needed to address pressures arising from the housing and jobs growth in the Science Vale area already allocated in existing local plans. The planning application was submitted in November 2021 and Vale Council responded with a letter of support in June 2023. The County Council has experienced delays in taking the application to County's planning committee for a decision. The County Council's transport planners are keeping our officers informed on progress with the scheme.

Supplementary question and response

Councillor Foxhall asked the following supplementary question to which Councillor Thomas undertook to provide a written response.

Thank you for your response. I note that you confirmed our council's support in general for the HIF1 project. However, both South and Vale have submitted substantial concerns, particularly about the environmental impacts of the scheme. If OCC fail to adequately address our officers' concerns, would that potentially change our council's support for the project?¹

F. Question from Councillor Cheryl Briggs to Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of the council

As the Bank of England raised interest rates again, widespread concerns have been aired about the "mortgage time bomb" which is anticipated as homeowners and landlords face very significant increases in their mortgage costs as fixed rate mortgage deals come to an end. How is the council planning ahead for the expected increased housing need from district residents struggling with big rises in mortgage or private rental costs over the next couple of years?

Response

The council has concern about the potential impacts that rising interest rates will have on both homeowners, and on landlords who have mortgages. There is concern that some will not be able to continue to meet their mortgage repayments and this may lead to the use of savings, downsizing or in the most extreme circumstances, repossession by mortgage lenders. This could result in owners or tenants being threatened with homelessness.

The council support those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness through its Housing Needs team. Anyone who is in this position is urged to approach the council as soon as possible, and they will be assigned a housing needs officer who will assess their situation under the relevant legislation and housing allocations policy. The aim is to support those who cannot support themselves to find alternative housing, either as an owner or in the private rental sector.

¹ Following the refusal of planning permission by Oxfordshire County Council's Planning and Regulatory Committee, Councillor Foxhall withdrew her supplementary question.

To bolster the formal level of resources, officers have allocated a proportion of the Homelessness Prevention Grant, provided by the Government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, to employ extra resources to handle the anticipated rise in approaches. The council can also use grant funding to provide support for qualifying homeless households to help get into the private rental sector. This includes rent in advance and/or deposits.

On 11 November 2022, the Cabinet approved a new Housing Delivery Strategy and Action Plan (<https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/housing/housing-delivery-strategy/>) which outlines a number of ways that we are looking to increase the amount of affordable housing. This includes looking to support those who own empty properties to bring them back into use, and to provide easier-to-access financial support for new affordable housing.

Officers are also considering effective ways to monitor rents in the private rental sector. Whilst the council does not have any powers to control rent levels in the private rental sector; by monitoring market rent levels, as well as continuing to licence Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), we continue to work closely with the sector to understand changes.

In March 2023, the Government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced a capital fund – the Local Authority Housing Fund, to enable local authorities in England to acquire and/or refurbish property in order to provide sustainable housing for families with housing needs who have arrived in the UK via the Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement and relocation schemes only. Round 2 of the fund was announced in June, with the stated aim of providing sustainable housing to those on the Afghan resettlement schemes and also to provide temporary accommodation to all those owed a homelessness duty by local authorities. The long term aim of the fund is to create a lasting supply of affordable housing for the general population, and Cabinet is seeking a decision from this Council meeting to agree the required capital commitment from this council to deliver the much needed housing which will help reduce local housing pressures and aligns with the council's housing delivery strategy.

The council has also approved a new five year partnership grant policy in June 2023 to ensure we support our residents with locally based assured, supported advice services, particularly important for those who are most in need due to inequalities from the cost of living crisis or other national issues.

Any residents who are worried about money and would like advice can also contact the council's Community Hub (01235 422600 option 1) who can talk residents through a range of options for support and advice.

G. Question from Councillor Sarah James to Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of the council

Our Corporate Plan and our Climate Action Plan quite rightly commit us to strong and rapid action to tackle Climate Change and I know that this is an important priority for the administration. They include a target to reduce the council's own carbon emissions by 75% by 2025.

Can you update us please on what percentage of carbon emissions reductions have been achieved to date, and on the plans in place to achieve the targeted 75% reduction?

Response

In 2019, Vale of White Horse declared a Climate Emergency and set an ambition to reduce the council carbon emissions by 75 per cent by 2025 and become a carbon neutral local authority by 2030. We are tracking progress against this and making progress. We have a webpage titled '[Cutting emissions from our own operations](#)' which contains more information on what we are doing and links to the annual Greenhouse Gas Emissions report that we publish. The latest published report is for 2021/22. Since the base year of 2009/10, when we produced our First Carbon Management Plan, we have achieved a 43 per cent reduction in our total emissions. The next Greenhouse Gas report which is for 2022/23 is currently under preparation and will be published later this summer.

Our leisure centres and waste collection service are our most significant emissions sources. Earlier this year we had the good news that our application to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme had been successful. This means we have secured major government funding worth £5.99 million for decarbonising Wantage Leisure Centre and White Horse Leisure & Tennis Centre. This will involve replacing the gas-fired boilers with air source heat pumps, installing energy efficiency measures and installing solar PV panels. This, together with previously completed projects such as at Faringdon Leisure Centre for example and other planned projects, we anticipate will reduce the council's carbon emissions by over 25%. We will present a trajectory showing expected emissions reductions from our current planned projects in an emissions forecast which we hope to release the results of later this summer.

Progress on decarbonising our waste emissions has been impacted by delays in the government publishing details of how the Environment Act 2021 is to be implemented, however reducing these emissions will be a key focus for delivery of our waste services going forward.

Further details of the range of plans in place to reduce the remainder of our emissions are contained in the [Climate Action Plan](#), which is available on our website.

26. Motions on notice

- A. Councillor James Cox moved, and Councillor Jill Rayner seconded the motion set out on the agenda.

Following debate and being put to the vote the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED:

That Council notes:

- In the latest available figures published by the ONS, The Vale of White Horse had the highest number of recorded deaths by suicide in Oxfordshire and with a rate higher than the national average.
- 2021 (the last available data year) had the highest number of deaths by suicide since records began in 2001.
- Suicide is a public health matter and every death should be considered preventable.
- The cost of living crisis is already taking a huge toll on people's mental health. Research by the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute says that people are already feeling the crisis.

- In August 2022, CEOs of multiple mental health organisations, including Mind and Samaritans, wrote to the Prime Minister noting an increase in calls and enquiries related to financial concerns and proposed a national suicide prevention strategy.

Council resolves to:

1. Join the Zero Suicide Alliance network.
2. Promote existing safeguarding and suicide prevention training and resources to all council workers and signpost to the council's wellbeing pages and Mental Health First Aiders,
3. Include appropriate signposting to suicide prevention and/or mental health support in cost of living material, on the online community hub, and in arrears letters.
4. For the Council Leader to write to local MPs informing them of the situation and asking them to lobby for the implementation of a national suicide prevention strategy.

B. Councillor Ron Batstone moved, and Councillor Andy Cooke seconded, a revised motion as set out below which reflected discussions between the Green and Liberal Democrat Groups

This council shares the alarm of residents at the significant numbers of sewage flooding incidents affecting local foul and surface water systems in our District and notes that adequate investment does not appear to have been forthcoming from Thames Water to resolve capacity or maintenance issues and ensure that adequate sewerage systems are provided within a reasonable timeframe.

The impact of this lack of investment in the sewerage system has ranged from pipe bursts, blockages and backing up, affecting local households and buildings through to the significant (and rising) levels of raw sewage in chalk streams and local rivers.

In the last three years, Thames Water's own records show that they have dumped raw sewage into waterways in the Vale of White Horse for nearly 15,000 hours, during 1352 separate events, from the district's 12 sewage treatment works. These locations include rare chalk streams, delicate river ecosystems, SSSI nature reserves and open streams within our villages.

This council recognises the huge amount of work that the council has already undertaken, alongside the efforts of campaigners and local members to raise awareness of this issue, and notes that it has been brought into sharp focus in light of the recent news surrounding Thames Water in terms of its debt, financial instability and the sudden resignation of their Chief Executive, Sarah Bentley.

Council believes:

1. The sewerage system should have adequate capacity to ensure that local rivers and watercourses are protected from the immediate and cumulative effects of routine and emergency sewage releases by Thames Water.
2. That Thames Water must improve and extend its monitoring, and increase transparency to demonstrate that improvements are being achieved. Ideally, this would include adding historical data to its real time EDM map.
3. Thames Water, or in the event it has to take the company into public ownership, the Government, should seek to invest in new capacity to stop sewage outflows into our water courses without causing further damage to the environment or local communities.

4. The planning system should ensure that new houses can only be occupied once sufficient capacity in the local sewerage network is in place.

Council resolves to:

1. Ask the Leader to write to Thames Water and request the full extent of Thames Water's plans to upgrade sewage treatment works in the Vale over the next five, ten and fifteen years.
2. Consider options, as part of the development of the Joint Local Plan, to ensure that adequate sewerage capacity is in place to avoid the discharge of raw sewage into rivers and watercourses before new homes are occupied and whether this can be made a condition of any planning consent.
3. Request that District Council planning officers include in all reports relating to major development a section that outlines the potential effects a development may have on sewage outflow into watercourses, or to note if such information has not been made available to the Council by the developer.
4. Ask the Scrutiny Committee to consider this issue and seek to identify ways to hold Thames Water Limited to account for their infrastructure maintenance, development, progress, leak and progress against their Management Plan and planning responses.
5. Ask the Leader of the Council to continue to meet with and urge Thames Water to improve their performance.
6. Ask the Leader of the Council to write to local MPs to support national legislation to significantly speed up investment in sewerage capacity and to hold water companies to account when they fail.
7. Invite the newly appointed Nature Recovery Champion to work with officers to understand how the council monitors local sewage discharges and related data and report on it regularly to the Leader.

Councillor Foxhall reported that the sources for the information set out in paragraph three of the motion were compiled from available data available in the following places:

- Rivers Trust "Is My River Fit to Play In" interactive map: [Is my river fit to play in? \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.rivers.org.uk/arcgis.com)
- Event Duration Monitoring Storm Overflow Monitor Annual Returns: [Defra Data Services Platform](#)

Following debate and being put to the vote the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED:

That this council shares the alarm of residents at the significant numbers of sewage flooding incidents affecting local foul and surface water systems in our District and notes that adequate investment does not appear to have been forthcoming from Thames Water to resolve capacity or maintenance issues and ensure that adequate sewerage systems are provided within a reasonable timeframe.

The impact of this lack of investment in the sewerage system has ranged from pipe bursts, blockages and backing up, affecting local households and buildings through to the significant (and rising) levels of raw sewage in chalk streams and local rivers.

In the last three years, Thames Water's own records show that they have dumped raw sewage into waterways in the Vale of White Horse for nearly 15,000 hours, during 1352 separate events, from the District's 12 sewage treatment works. These locations

include rare chalk streams, delicate river ecosystems, SSSI nature reserves and open streams within our villages².

This council recognises the huge amount of work that the council has already undertaken, alongside the efforts of campaigners and local members to raise awareness of this issue, and notes that it has been brought into sharp focus in light of the recent news surrounding Thames Water in terms of its debt, financial instability and the sudden resignation of their Chief Executive, Sarah Bentley.

Council believes:

1. The sewerage system should have adequate capacity to ensure that local rivers and watercourses are protected from the immediate and cumulative effects of routine and emergency sewage releases by Thames Water.
2. That Thames Water must improve and extend its monitoring and increase transparency to demonstrate that improvements are being achieved. Ideally, this would include adding historical data to its real time EDM map.
3. Thames Water, or in the event it has to take the company into public ownership, the Government, should seek to invest in new capacity to stop sewage outflows into our water courses without causing further damage to the environment or local communities.
4. The planning system should ensure that new houses can only be occupied once sufficient capacity in the local sewerage network is in place.

Council resolves to:

1. Ask the Leader to write to Thames Water and request the full extent of Thames Water's plans to upgrade sewage treatment works in the Vale over the next five, ten and fifteen years.
2. Consider options, as part of the development of the Joint Local Plan, to ensure that adequate sewerage capacity is in place to avoid the discharge of raw sewage into rivers and watercourses before new homes are occupied and whether this can be made a condition of any planning consent.
3. Request that District Council planning officers include in all reports relating to major development a section that outlines the potential effects a development may have on sewage outflow into watercourses, or to note if such information has not been made available to the Council by the developer.
4. Ask the Scrutiny Committee to consider this issue and seek to identify ways to hold Thames Water Limited to account for their infrastructure maintenance, development, progress, leak and progress against their Management Plan and planning responses.
5. Ask the Leader of the Council to continue to meet with and urge Thames Water to improve their performance.
6. Ask the Leader of the Council to write to local MPs to support national legislation to significantly speed up investment in sewerage capacity and to hold water companies to account when they fail.
7. Invite the newly appointed Nature Recovery Champion to work with officers to understand how the council monitors local sewage discharges and related data and report on it regularly to the Leader.

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- ² Rivers Trust "Is My River Fit to Play In" interactive map: [Is my river fit to play in? \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.arcgis.com)
 - Event Duration Monitoring Storm Overflow Monitor Annual Returns: [Defra Data Services Platform](#)

The meeting closed at 8:35pm

Chair:

Date:

Council



Report of Head of Legal and Democratic

Author: Steven Corrigan

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DATE: 11 October 2023

Electoral Review of Vale of White Horse District Council – submission on council size

Recommendation(s)

1. To consider and approve the draft Council Size Submission set out in Appendix A which recommends an increase in the size of the council from 38 to 41.
2. Authorise the head of legal and democratic, in consultation with the Leader of the council, to finalise the Council Size Submission for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Purpose of Report

1. To consider and approve the draft Council Size Submission for recommendation to Council.

Corporate priorities

2. The review's principle of establishing a structure for fair and accountable local democracy reflects the council's priorities of working in an open and inclusive way and working in partnership.

Background

3. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 established the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (The Commission) as an independent statutory body with responsibility for ensuring electoral equality in English local authorities.
4. The Commission notified the council, in October 2022, that Vale of White Horse District Council would be subject to a periodic review because of electoral

inequality. Electoral inequality arises if electors are either over or under-represented by their members(s) when compared with average levels of representation across the district. Under the criteria adopted by The Commission, either of the following conditions are considered to warrant a review if the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period:

- Any local authority with a ward that has an electoral variance of 30% or over. This means a ward having 30% more or fewer electors per member than is average for the council as a whole.
- Any local authority where more than 30% of wards have an electoral variance of over 10% from the average for that authority.

5. In the case of Vale of White Horse District Council the current position is that:

- Ten of the 24 electoral wards (42%) have a variance of greater than 10%
- One of the electoral wards has a variance of over 30%

6. The map attached to this report shows those wards with an electoral imbalance.

7. The purpose of an electoral review is to consider the number of members elected to the Council, the names, number and boundaries of the wards, and the number of members to be elected to each ward.

8. There are two phases to the review. Phase one concentrates solely on council size. Phase two will consider and consult upon ward numbers and boundaries.

9. An all-member briefing was held on 7 June 2023 at which The Commission set out its timetable and remit for the review. Group Leaders also received a briefing on 5 June 2023.

10. At its meeting on 13 September 2023, the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee considered an officer draft Council Size Submission document which recommended a council size of 38 members reflecting the current arrangements. The committee agreed that, because of the recent and anticipated population growth, the increased workload on current members arising from this growth, the additional community representative role arising from requests to join community groups and the new member champion appointments, the desire to ensure the role of councillor remains attractive to a wide section of the community, particular those in work, a council size of 41 would be more appropriate. The committee also agreed that an increase in the size of the council could facilitate the creation of two member wards in some of the larger rural wards. The minutes of the meeting are available [here](#).

11. The timetable for the review is set out below:

Council Size

Activity	Involvement		Key Dates
	Council	LGBCE	
Develop council size proposal	Council Political Groups	Officers will be available to answer any technical queries on making a submission.	Now until mid-November 2023
Submission of council size proposals	Council Political Groups	Officers will acknowledge receipt of submissions.	4 November 2023
Commission Meeting: Council Size	Not required	Commission	12 December 2022

Warding Patterns

Activity	Involvement		Key Dates
	Council	LGBCE	
Consultation on warding patterns	Council Political Groups General Public	Run consultation, collate & analyse responses.	19 December – 11 March 2024 (extra 2 weeks for Christmas)
Commission Meeting: Draft Recommendations	Not required	Commission	21 May 2024
Consultation on Draft Recommendations	Council Political Groups General Public	Publish draft recommendations. Run consultation, collate & analyse responses.	4 June 2024 – 12 August 2024
Commission Meeting: Final Recommendations	Not required	Commission	15 October 2024
Final recommendations published	Not required	Commission	29 October 2024

Order

Activity	Involvement		Key Dates
	Council	LGBCE	
Order laid	Not required	Commission	Winter 2024
Order made	Not required	Commission	Early 2025
Implementation	Council	Not required	2027

12. The first decision gateway for the Council is to agree its Council Size Submission to The Commission by 4 November.

Preferred Option

13. The Commission provides a template for the Council Size Submission. The template is for the council to make arguments about the number of members that it considers will deliver effective governance for the Vale measured by three key dimensions – strategic leadership, accountability, and community leadership.
14. Council is requested to review and approve the draft Submission attached at Appendix A, which is based on officer opinion, and authorise the head of legal and democratic to produce a final version for submission to the October Council meeting.

Climate and ecological impact implications

15. There are no climate and ecological implications arising from this report.

Financial Implications

16. There are no significant financial implications arising from this report. An increase in council size to 41 members would result in an 8% increase in the basic allowances budget.

Legal Implications

17. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 sets out duty placed on the Boundary Commission to undertake an electoral review of every principal local authority in England ‘from time to time’. A review follows a prescribed process and the Council, as a body corporate, is one of the consultees.

Risks

18. The Commission’s review requires extensive officer support and input particularly from those in electoral services, policy, communications and the GIS team at various stages of the process which could impact on resources and service delivery. To mitigate this, officers from these areas have been briefed on the timetable, process and the information that will be required during the review by The Commission.

Other Implications

19. None.

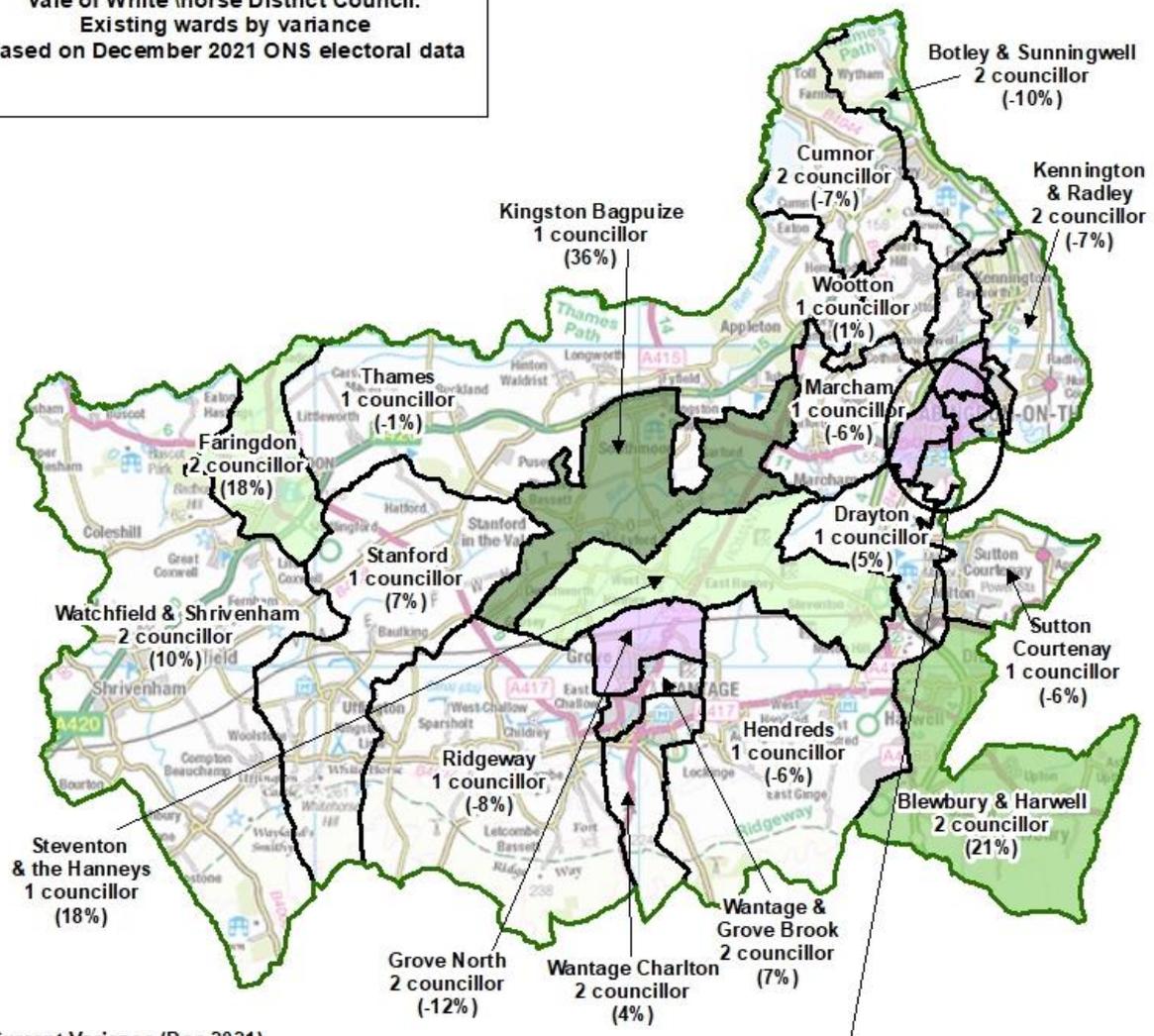
Conclusion

9. The Commission is undertaking an electoral review of Vale of White Horse District Council. The first decision The Commission will take is how many members the Council should have. Vale of White Horse District Council is invited to make a proposal for how many members it believes there should be in the future. To meet this stage in the review process Council is invited to agree a submission on the council size to the Local Government Boundary Commission.

Background Papers

- None

Vale of White Horse District Council:
Existing wards by variance
Based on December 2021 ONS electoral data



Current Variance (Dec 2021)

- < -10% Variance
- Within Tolerance
- > + 10% Variance
- > + 20% Variance
- > + 30% Variance



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Vale of White Horse District Council

Council Size Submission

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How to Make a Submission

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

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

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

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

About You

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

This submission was agreed by full Council at its meeting on 11 October 2023. The council's Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee considered a draft document produced by officers at meetings on 11 and 25 September 2023 and agreed a submission to recommend to full Council.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

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

Review identified by The Commission.

The Context for your proposal

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

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

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Local Authority Profile

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

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

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

The Vale is a predominantly rural area located in south-west Oxfordshire. It is bounded to the north and east by the Thames and to the south by the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – parts of which run through the district.

The district contains the historic market towns of Abingdon-on-Thames, Faringdon and Wantage, the local service centres of Botley and Grove and numerous picturesque villages. As a result of recent growth, the Vale also contains a growing proportion of the town of Didcot. (In addition, at its north-eastern edge the district borders the university city of Oxford, while at its south-western extremity it nudges into the outer suburbs of Swindon).

According to Census 2021, the usual resident population of the district was 138,900. This was an increase of nearly 18,000 (or 14.8%) on the figure recorded in 2011 – faster than the rates seen across Oxfordshire (10.9%), the South East (7.5%) and England (6.6%). This rise in population was driven by continued development at sites across the district (Great Western Park, Kingsgrove etc). Between 2001/02 and 2021/22, an additional 15,381 dwellings have been added to the housing stock in the Vale (70.7% of these have been added in the last ten years). However, despite this growth, the Vale remains one of the least densely populated local authorities in the South East of England (11th out of 64). The growth in population is anticipated to continue and is covered further in the Other Issues section of this submission to support a small increase in the council size.

Being only 60 miles from London and with good access links to the Midlands and the Southwest via the M4, A34 and M40, the Vale is home to many cutting-edge businesses (many of which are in the Science Vale area, an internationally significant location for innovation and science-based research and business).

The Vale on most measures would be classified as affluent. A significantly higher proportion of people have higher level qualifications and are employed in the professional occupations than in the wider South East region. In addition, fewer people are unemployed, economically inactive or live in poverty.

Moreover, Vale of White Horse is, according to the latest Indices of Multiple Deprivation, one of the least deprived local authorities in England (it ranked 305th out of 317). The majority of Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) within the district are amongst the least deprived in the country (45 out of 76 are in the 20.0% least deprived nationally). There are, nevertheless, pockets of deprivation – one LSOA in Abingdon Caldecott is amongst the 20.0% most deprived in the country, while another in Faringdon is in the 50.0% most deprived.

As a result of recent population growth and an ageing population (the median age of a resident of the Vale is slightly above that for England), demand for services has increased. This can be seen in relation to health and social care (of the nine GP surgeries in the district, five have a higher patient to full-time GP ratio than the English average) and school placements. Due to the different demographics of wards within the Vale, these problems are more prevalent in certain areas than others.

Housing affordability continues to be a problem throughout the district. The average house price in the Vale (year ending June 2022) was £365,000 – the 49th highest amongst the 298 local authorities in England and Wales (excluding London).

Council Size

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

Strategic Leadership

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

Topic		
<p>Governance Model</p>	<p>Key lines of explanation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i> ➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i> ➤ <i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Vale of White Horse District Council operates under the Strong Leader Cabinet model form of governance in line with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Every four years Council elects a Leader who can then appoint up to nine members to form a Cabinet, one of which must be appointed as the Deputy Leader.</p> <p>There are approximately 8 formal Cabinet meetings per year which last on average 1 hour and 10 minutes and nine informal Cabinet briefings lasting on average 2 hours and 10 minutes.</p> <p>This model of governance is expected to continue and has worked effectively since its introduction in 2001 reflecting effective, efficient, and accountable decision making.</p> <p>At the annual meeting in May 2023 Council made appointments to 72 seats on committees (details under Delegated Responsibilities section). Cabinet members are not permitted to sit on any scrutiny committee, the Joint Audit and Governance Committee or the Planning Committee. For each non-Cabinet member this equates to 2.48 seats on</p>

		<p>committees and panels which is considered a balanced commitment. In addition, each member is allocated a seat on one of the area committees.</p> <p>Members provide the political and strategic leadership to the council. There is a confident and assured distinction between member and officer roles underpinned by close and effective working based on mutual trust and respect.</p>
<p>Portfolios</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The current Leader has appointed a Cabinet of eight in addition to themselves with portfolios as below:</p> <p>Climate action and the environment (Leader) Strategic partnerships and place (Deputy Leader) Affordable housing, infrastructure, development and infrastructure Environmental services and waste Finance and property Leisure centres and community buildings Planning and development management Corporate services, policy and programmes Community health and wellbeing</p> <p>Whilst Cabinet meets collectively to take certain decisions, Cabinet members have individual decision-making powers within their portfolios. Approximately 40 decisions are taken by Cabinet and 50 Individual Cabinet Member Decisions taken annually. There is also a structured model of delegation to officers, which enables the council to operate effectively and provides a strong framework for decision making in a transparent manner that can be subject to Scrutiny review.</p> <p>In addition to formal meetings, Cabinet members represent the council on joint committees and outside bodies – see external partnership section.</p> <p>Cabinet members are, on occasion, requested to attend meetings of the Scrutiny and Joint Scrutiny committees to collaboratively develop policy or be held to account for their portfolio responsibilities.</p>

		<p>Whilst the role of a Cabinet member is not defined as a full-time requirement it does require a significant time commitment. The current size of the Cabinet not only reflects the range of responsibilities and priorities of the council but ensures that portfolios are not so large that they are unmanageable for those members who work full-time or have commitments outside the council.</p>
<p>Delegated Responsibilities</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>As previously mentioned, in accordance with the Leader and Cabinet model, Cabinet is responsible for taking the major decisions with appropriate delegations to individual cabinet members and officers.</p> <p>Full Council takes decisions in relation to the functions it is required to do so by law.</p> <p>Delegations to Officers</p> <p>The Council has agreed a well proven scheme of delegation to officers detailed in the council's constitution. The majority of decisions, particularly operational matters, are made by officers under delegated powers in line with the parameters set by members. The effective operation of the delegation scheme relies upon close co-operation and liaison between officers and members, including scrutiny.</p> <p>Major Decisions</p> <p>All councillors are involved in agreeing the policy framework and all items included in it and in setting the budget at meetings of the full Council. Every four years full Council agrees a corporate plan. Members support policy development and scrutinise budget proposals at scrutiny meetings.</p> <p>Delegations to Committees</p> <p>The Council discharges its function through a number of standing committees:</p> <p>Appeals Committee (NNDR, Benefits and housing)</p> <p>This comprises three members to consider appeals against a council decision in respect of housing matters, appeals against NNDR rate relief or benefits. It has never met.</p>

Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee

This committee comprises six members and is responsible for undertaking community governance reviews and polling district and polling places reviews. It makes recommendations to full Council on electoral arrangements in respect of LGBCE Reviews and responds to consultations on parliamentary and county council division reviews. It meets on average four times a year.

General Licensing Committee

The committee comprises 12 members and is responsible for dealing with issues relating to licensing and registration – hackney carriage and private hire vehicles, contaminated land, air quality, health and safety, street trading and street naming. Panels of three members consider individual cases. (Details of the time commitment and workload are set out in the statutory function section).

Joint Audit and Governance Committee

This comprises eight councillors (Four from Vale of White Horse District Council and four from South Oxfordshire District Council) and one independent member. It meets on average six times a year with an average meeting time of one hour to consider the Council's governance & audit functions. An important part of the role is to receive external audit reports to "those discharged with responsibility for governance". The Committee advises on the Standards Framework for Members and considers any allegations of misconduct through Code of Conduct Panels drawn from its membership.

Joint Staff Committee

This committee comprises 10 members (five from Vale of White Horse District Council and five from South Oxfordshire District Council). It acts as the recruitment panel for the appointment of the chief executive, deputy chief executives, monitoring officer and chief financial officer, is responsible for disciplinary action against these posts and considers appeals against such action. It also reviews the targets and performance review undertaken by the Leaders. Previously the committee acted as the appointment panel for all heads of service appointments which increased the number of meetings to an average of four a year during the previous council (2019-2023). The frequency of meetings will reduce as a result of the change to the terms of reference.

		<p>Licensing Acts Committee This comprises 12 members (the same membership as for the General Licensing Committee), the maximum number permitted under legislation, and is responsible for matters under the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2002. Panels of three members consider individual cases. (Details of the time commitment and workload are set out in the statutory function section).</p> <p>Planning Committee This committee comprises nine members and is responsible for the determination of planning applications that are not delegated to officers. (Details of the time commitment and workload are set out in the statutory function section).</p> <p>Others:</p> <p>Area Committees The council has three area committees (Abingdon and North East, Faringdon, and Wantage) comprising the ward members within the relevant geographical area. Whilst the committees are a forum for issues in the geographical area their primary purpose has been to make grant awards on behalf of Cabinet. Each committee met once in the previous council between May 2019 and May 2023. This is primarily due to the pressure on grant resource.</p> <p>Climate Emergency Advisory Committee Following the elections in May 2019 the council established a new advisory committee in response to the climate emergency to advise Cabinet on matters relating to the climate emergency and environmental sustainability. It comprises seven members and currently meets about four times a year.. It is likely that this committee will see an increase in its workload.</p>
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Accountability

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

Topic	
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<p>Internal Scrutiny</p>	<p>The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.</p>
<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i> ➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i> ➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i> ➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i> ➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i> ➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i>
<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Vale of White Horse District Council has one Scrutiny Committee and a Joint Scrutiny Committee with South Oxfordshire District Council.</p> <p>The council's scrutiny committee assists with policy development, undertakes pre-decision input and holds Cabinet and officers to account for decisions taken via the call-in mechanism.</p> <p>The committee comprises nine members and meets approximately five times a year and has a rolling work programme which is reviewed at each meeting. The average meeting time is 1 hour and seven minutes.</p> <p>The scrutiny function at the council has not changed significantly over a number of years. However, there is currently a move to enhance the role of scrutiny including the provision of dedicated officer support to enhance its role. Following the elections in May 2023 the council brought in an external trainer from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to deliver training to the committee. Officers are also currently reviewing the officer support to the committee with the intention of providing more targeted support with research and reviews and report preparation which has traditionally been undertaken by the democratic services team or the relevant service within their current workload and demands.</p> <p>The Joint Scrutiny Committee comprises 10 members with five from Vale of White Horse District Council. The committee meets on average four times a year with an average meeting time of two hours. The joint committee reviews the performance of contractors delivering joint contracts for both councils, acts as the crime and disorder committee of the</p>

		council in accordance with the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009 and considers matters that affect residents of both council area. The establishment of a joint committee in 2015 reflects the joint working relationship between Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire district councils.
	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 committee for members?</i>
	Analysis	<p>There is a single council wide planning committee comprising nine members. During the last municipal year, the committee met on 16 occasions with an average meeting time of 1 hour and 48 minutes with each meeting considering an average of three applications. Since the last electoral review, the committee membership has reduced from 15 to nine members. In addition to meeting time however, members attend site visits and are engaged in substantial pre-meeting preparation reading the reports and viewing plans prior to the meetings.</p> <p>The vast majority of planning applications are determined by officers. The council reviewed the scheme of delegation to officers with a view to reducing the number of planning applications going forward to committee which should otherwise be dealt with by officers.</p> <p>All members of the committee (including those who could serve as substitutes) are required to undertake planning training before being permitted to determine any applications. This training covers the role and responsibilities of the committee and planning department, legislative framework and policy framework, how planning decisions are taken and the conduct of members. There is an ongoing training programme for committee members.</p> <p>The Planning Advisory Service has recently undertaken a review of the planning department and the committee. The recommendations of the review are currently being considered for implementation and should further improve the work of the</p>

		committee. We do not envisage any significant change in the committee's workload over the next few years.
Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<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 General Licensing Committee and a Licensing Committee with both comprised of the same membership of 12 members with the same Chair and Vice-Chair for both committees responsible for a wide range of licence related and regulatory matters and applications. Both committees are politically balanced. Each committee met once in 2022/23.</p> <p>Both committees establish panels (known as sub-committees) to consider individual licensing matters such as applications for premises licenses for the sale of alcohol, reviewing applications for premises licenses, applications for street trading, the refusal or revocation of taxi licenses or appeals against street naming. The panels comprise three members drawn from the committee membership. This allows for a sharing of the workload. Whilst the intention is to share the workload the time commitment for members will depend on their availability and will therefore fluctuate.</p> <p>One premises licensing panel was held in 2022/23.</p> <p>No taxi licensing panels were held in contrast to nine in the previous municipal year. This decrease reflects the decision by the head of service to make decisions using his delegation and only refer the more serious cases to a panel.</p>
Other Regulatory Bodies	Key lines of explanation	<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	N/A
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i>

Analysis

Members are appointed as the council's representative on a range of different external organisations, joint committees, panels, groups and partnerships.

Following the elections in May 2023 the Leader of council made a number of appointments to outside organisations a number of which have strategic importance. These are set out in the Individual Cabinet member decision available [here](#). Some years ago (2012) the council undertook a review of appointments to outside organisations and as a result significantly reduced the number of organisations it makes appointments to from over 60 to approximately 30 this year. The review concluded that the council should only make appointments to organisations that enable the council to be represented at a strategic level, which benefit the council and support the delivery of its corporate objectives or meet a statutory requirement. The outcome of the review demonstrated a reduction in the workload and responsibility placed on members. That review supported the council's business case to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for undertaking the previous review of the council size:

'Historically, the council has nominated councillors to sit on a wide variety of outside bodies. Recent analysis has indicated, however, that a review is overdue with the rationale for some external appointments lost over time. The expectation is that the council will nominate many fewer councillors to sit on outside bodies at its next annual meeting in May.'

A review is undertaken every four years, via a questionnaire to the serving member, to assess which outside body appointments should be retained. Whilst the council has reduced the number of formal appointments to outside organisations, members report that they are approached by local organisations to join various bodies as the local ward member.

The council also makes appointments to joint committees as below:

- [Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) (one member and one substitute). Meets approximately seven times a year with meetings lasting on average in excess of four hours.
- [Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel](#) (one member and one substitute). Meets approximately four times a year for a duration of two and a half hours.
- [Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel](#) (three members)

Cabinet members serve as the council's representative on the following joint committees:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Joint Committee – one member and one substitute • The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Housing Advisory Group – one member with all other Cabinet members as substitutes • The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Environment Advisory Group – one member with all other Cabinet members as substitutes • The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Infrastructure Advisory Group – one member with all other Cabinet members as substitutes • The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Planning Advisory Group – one member with all other Cabinet members as substitutes • Five Councils' Partnership Corporate Joint Committee – two members with one substitute. The Five Councils partnership jointly deliver a range of corporate, property and facilities management services for Hart District Council, Havant Borough Council, Mendip District Council, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils. <p>Cabinet members serve as the council's representative on several external organisations as set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership – one member • Safer Oxfordshire Partnership Oversight Committee – one member • South and Vale Community Safety Partnership – one member • Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board – one member and one substitute • Health Improvement Partnership Board – one member • Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board – two members • Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership – one member
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Community Leadership

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

Topic		Description
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 approach taken by Vale of White Horse District Council members to engagement with their local communities varies from member to member and the level of engagement is at the discretion of each member. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority are proactively involved within their wards with their communities as opposed to merely responding to case work. Engagement includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding ward surgeries – dealing with queries, providing advice and engaging with their community face to face; • Dealing with constituency matters via email, written or telephone; • Working with or offering support to community/resident groups and/or local organisations; • Attending parish and/or town council meetings; • Contact with parish and/or town councils; • Maintaining blogs and/or websites and social media; • Articles for parish/community magazines and newsletters. <p>As set out in the delegated decision section, the council has three area committees although these only met once in the previous council term.</p> <p>The council operates in a three-tier local government structure, with Oxfordshire County Council as the upper tier authority. The district is fully parished. A number of</p>

		<p>members are twin or triple hatted – meaning they are elected for more than one of the three tiers of local government. The number of twin or triple hatted members will impact on the capacity of members at the district level.</p> <p>Following the elections in May 2023, the Leader of the council has appointed eight champions to act as a focus for the local community at elected member level and provide Cabinet with knowledge and advice in the respective areas. These important and high profile appointments are filled by backbenchers and adds considerably to their workload. They report to the relevant Cabinet portfolio holder. Details of the champions are set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Food and Farming Champion promotes local food production and distribution, with particular reference to farming in the Vale. They take on board other important aspects of farming such as the climate impact of different foods and biodiversity and nature recovery. • The Military and Veterans Champion takes a particular interest in matters to do with the Military and Veterans liaising with relevant stakeholders to strengthen the council’s relationship and improve the lives of our military residents wherever possible. • The Nature Recovery Champion promotes the council’s nature recovery projects and works with relevant stakeholders to promote biodiversity and natural spaces in the Vale. • The Small Business Champion liaises with the Economic Development Team under the Cabinet member to promote small business opportunities in the Vale meeting with relevant stakeholders. • The Science Vale Champion has a special interest in the science hubs that the council has had a relationship with and works to promote and strengthen connections with Milton Park, Harwell and other sites. • The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion meets with various stakeholders to improve the council’s relationships with harder to reach groups and have a special interest in enhancing inclusion. • The Cost of Living Champion researches different aspects of the Cost of Living Crisis and its impact on residents and their mental health, working with outside bodies including Vale Community Impact and the Citizen’s Advice Bureau. • The Active Travel Champion works with relevant stakeholders to investigate the ways in which the council can influence active travel within the district.
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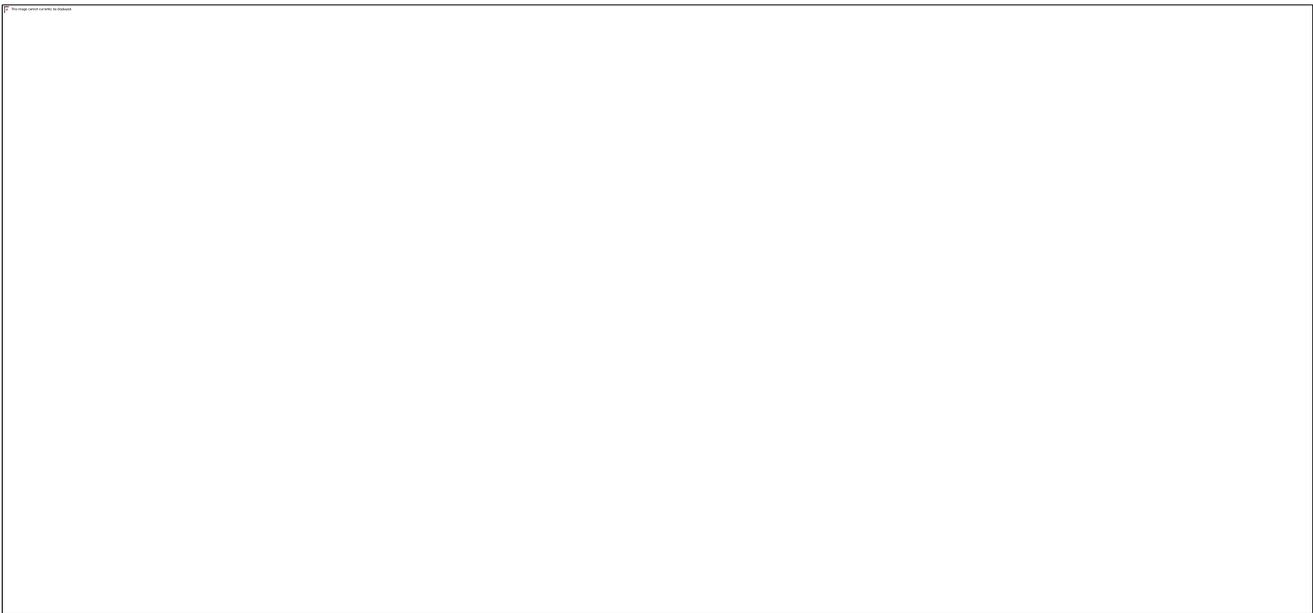
Casework	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i> ➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i>
	Analysis	<p>There is no case management system in place to support members' ward work with each member managing their ward work differently. Members take responsibility for their casework and manage their work appropriately with officer support if required. Officer support is available to assist members as and when requested to provide information, technical and professional advice and guidance. Contact is primarily made with officers via telephone or email.</p> <p>After the elections in May 2023, an induction programme was provided to all members and this training is ongoing to support members in their various roles. The democratic services team provides a first point of contact for all members. The council also operates a Buddy system whereby each member has access to a senior officer who can signpost queries to the relevant service/officer. The democratic services team is scheduled to investigate how it can further support members with their ward work.</p> <p>It is difficult to identify the average number of hours that a member spends on ward work as this is likely to vary depending on the type of ward in terms of the issues raised, the number of members representing a ward and other commitments.</p> <p>Members receive a fortnightly InFocus bulletin from the corporate communications team keeping them up-to date on current news, issues and events going on within the council. Members are expected to attend meetings of the parish/town councils within their ward to brief on district council activities affecting their area, discuss ward matters and help to identify ways in which the district council can support issues at the parish level.</p> <p>The members' allowances scheme allows for the claiming of mileage for the attendance at these meetings. The time commitment for such a role will depend on the number of parish/town councils within each ward. A parish newsletter is also sent to all parish clerks which ensures consistent information is conveyed to all parish and town councils.</p> <p>As was noted in the council's submission on council size in 2012, advances in technology continue to provide residents</p>

		with an alternative means to access information rather than contact their ward member. In addition, the development of the council's website has increased the amount of information and number of transactions that customers can access directly without the need to involve their ward member.
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Other Issues

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

As illustrated below Vale of White Horse District Council already has a high electorate to member ratio in comparison to other authorities in its CIPFA group.



As evidenced in the Local Authority Profile section of this submission, the district has experienced substantial population growth in recent years. The district is also forecast to have significant population growth over the coming years as shown in the population forecasts below. This does not reflect the smaller planning changes that increase population density in existing developments and other population trends.

Year	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033
ONS Population Projection (2018 based)	143,968	145,593	147,105	148,516	149,839	151,093	152,278	153,375	154,398	155,379	156,331
OCC Population Projection (2021 based)	144,137	146,628	149,090	151,877	154,750	157,445	160,402	163,440	166,455		

With the anticipated population growth, the level of constituency casework and associated community leadership role is expected to remain the same or increase placing a higher demand on existing members. It is important that members have sufficient capacity to not only meet their governance role but also their constituency role. It is the council's view that the case work from this population increase should be spread across more members to ensure the continued delivery of sound community representation. In addition, without enough members there could be an adverse impact on the council's ability to attract younger members who work or who have commitments outside the council. At recent elections the council has attracted a more diverse intake of members in terms of age and employment status and is keen to continue to do so.

Whilst elector ratios and ward patterns do not normally feature in submissions during this stage of an electoral review, it is considered that a small increase in the number of members would provide for better electoral equality and effective warding patterns in the next stage of the review. In its submission as part of the 2012 review, the council increased its initial proposal from 34 to 38 members to provide for discreet representation for the district's four main settlements – Abingdon, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage. It is considered that a small increase in member numbers could continue to facilitate this and provide for an effective warding pattern and electoral equality in the rural areas. Because parishes usually feature as the building blocks for ward proposals a small increase in council size could make it more possible to formulate effective ward proposals that place each parish, and parishes with a shared community identity, within a single council ward, possibly represented by more than one member, and therefore achieve the statutory criteria for equality of representation, reflect the identities and interests of local communities and secure effective and convenient local government.

Summary

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

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

The current governance model has supported Vale in delivering on the requirements placed on it for effective, transparent decision making in a three-tier area where all upper and lower tier councils operate the strong leader model with members fulfilling both their governance and community leadership roles.

The last review of electoral arrangements in Vale of White Horse District Council took place in 2012 at the request of the council following a request to reduce the size of the council. In its formal submission the council proposed a council size of 38 members – a reduction from 51 members. The arguments put forward for the reduction were that the council had streamlined its decision-making process reflecting the new executive arrangements, had increased delegated decision making so that fewer members were required to conduct the day to day business of the council, that new technology had sped up the decision making processes and made it simpler to move to more delegated decisions and had changed the way constituents make contact with the council. The officer report and submission are available [here](#). Since that time the council has further streamlined decision making with increased delegation reducing the number of decisions requiring member input resulting in fewer and shorter committee meetings. In addition, the council has established two joint committees with South Oxfordshire District Council (Joint Audit and Governance Committee and Joint Scrutiny Committee) which require a lower membership from this council. Committee sizes are generally smaller therefore reducing the number of members required to run the business of council although the council maintains in addition its own scrutiny committee. The size of Cabinet has increased, reflecting the increased responsibility in terms of priorities and further representation on external strategic partnerships. This increase has been accommodated by a reduction in the requirement of members to fulfil other roles on committees. Advances in technology have further impacted the role of members. A number of meetings are now held virtually, and unless involved in the formal decision-making process, ward members can address committees, particularly planning committee, without the need to travel. How residents access information and services has further reduced the need for them to rely on contacting members directly. There are no issues that indicate any significant changes to the council's governance structure are required other than an increase in the council size to address the points made above in Other Issues – substantial population growth, a balanced constituency workload and maintaining a diversity of members. The changes mentioned above mitigate, but do not eliminate, the increased workload of members resulting from the current and projected increase in population growth.

In summary a council of 41 members would provide minimal change and continue to ensure the council is run efficiently and support a balanced workload for members. It would allow members to continue to fulfil their roles as strategic leaders, community leaders and to continue to deliver effective scrutiny, regulation and partnership working and future proof against population growth. The increase in council size would allow members to continue to effectively represent their constituents and continue to attract a better diversity of members.