

Oadby & Wigston Borough Council

# Council Size Submission: Template

Oadby & Wigston Borough Council

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## How to Make a Submission

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

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

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

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

## About You

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

This response has been prepared by Officers on behalf of the Council and was approved for submission at the Full Council meeting held on 24 September 2024:

Of the 21 Councillors in attendance (3 were absent and 2 attended remotely so therefore were unable to vote) at Full Council:

- 19 voted in Favour
- 1 voted Against
- 1 Left the meeting prior to the vote being taken

An alternative proposal was put forward for debate by the sole Independent Member which suggested that the number of councillors be reduced to 22. There was no support for that proposition. The Independent Member will submit his own proposal to the Commission.

## 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?

Oadby and Wigston Borough Council (OWBC) is a non-metropolitan borough council operating as part of a 2 tier administrative structure, whereby Leicestershire County Council is responsible for social services, education and highways.

OWBC is resident to 57,700 people.

The Borough of Oadby and Wigston is a relatively compact highly urbanised Borough (approximately 2,400 hectares in size) that lies directly adjacent to, and shares boundaries with, the City of Leicester, Harborough District and Blaby District. The urban areas of the Borough share a strong spatial relationship with Leicester City despite the differences in size and population. The Borough plays an important role in providing residents of the City of Leicester with a link to the countryside due to its position, ‘sandwiched’ between the City and the countryside beyond. Whilst there are good links with the City there is poor accessibility to the larger trunk roads in the area such as the M1 and M69.

The Borough is also home to Leicester Racecourse, the Leicester Botanical Gardens and an extensive estate of student halls of residence and associated facilities owned by Leicester University in Oadby with a transient student population of approximately 1,400 students.

The Census 2021 data also shows that the Borough has a higher-than-average population percentage over the age of 75 years old at 10.8%. This is the highest of all the Leicester and Leicestershire local authority areas and is higher than the East Midlands average (8.9%) and the England average (8.5%).

The cultural composition of the Borough’s population is rich in diversity. The Asian population represent 27.9% of the Borough’s overall population, the Black population represent 2.2% of the population and the mixed/multiple ethnic groups represent 3.2%. The Asian population figure is approximately three and a half times higher than the East Midlands regional average figure of 8% (Census 2021).

The percentage of residents identified as being disabled and who reported that their ability to carry out day-to-day activities is ‘limited a lot’ in the Borough is 6.5%. The percentage who are disabled and who reported that their ability to carry out day-to-day activities is ‘limited a little’ is 10.1%. Overall, in 2021, 46.2% of residents described their health as “very good”, increasing from 44.4% in 2011.

The Borough is ranked 249th out of 317, (where 1 is the most deprived) by the Indices of Deprivation 2019<sup>1</sup>. The indices also measure deprivation for each Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) in England. On a settlement basis, South Wigston has the highest levels of social deprivation. The difference in life expectancy for males between Oadby and South Wigston is 13 years.

The Local Plan 2012- 2031 was adopted in 2019 and at that point the Council's Objectively assessed Need for housing was assessed at 2,960 new homes for the period 2011 to 2031. To deliver this, the Plan allocated three main Direction for Growth areas, two in Oadby, and one in Wigston.

Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 up until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, there have been 990 houses completed and there are 1,137 houses that have either commenced or have full planning permission.

The Local Plan is currently being refreshed with a view to submission of a new plan (2020-41) for inspection in 2025. That plan will make provision for 5,040 new homes over the 21 year plan period. The majority of the development is likely to come forward in the electoral wards of Oadby Grange; Oadby Uplands; Oadby Woodlands; Oadby Brocks Hill; Wigston Meadowcourt; and, Wigston All Saints.

The Borough is unparished and there are no local neighbourhood plans.

### 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		
<b>Governance Model</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i></li> <li>➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or</i></li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> MHCLG: [English indices of deprivation \(2019\)](#)

		<p><i>scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i></p> <p>➤ <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>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>OWBC operates a Committee system.</p> <p>These arrangements are reflected in the Constitution. Part 3 – Responsibility for Functions sets out the those bodies/officers responsible for exercising the functions of the Council.</p> <p>In addition to Full Council there are 4 main committees:-:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Finance and Development Committee (14 Members)</li> <li>• Service Delivery Committee (15 Members)</li> <li>• Licensing and Regulatory Committee (10 Members)</li> <li>• Audit Committee (7 Members)</li> </ul> <p>In addition there are a number of other working groups which feed into the main Committees and act as a sounding board for the development of other policies and strategies such as the Place Shaping Working Group, Armed Forces Working Group and the Health and Wellbeing Board.</p> <p>The Council elects a Leader on an annual basis and the size and membership of the Committees is also reviewed on an annual basis to ensure effectiveness. The most recent example of a change to the structure is the merging of the Environmental Working Group with the Place Shaping Group given the strong synergies between the 2 groups.</p> <p>As OWBC operate a committee system no Members have individual decision-making powers but the Chairs of the main committees act as representatives and spokespersons for their nominated areas of responsibility.</p> <p>The Policy Finance and Development Committee (PFDC) deals with all of the local authority's finance functions which are within the Council's Budget and</p>

		<p>Policy Framework as set by Full Council on the recommendation of the PFDC.</p> <p>Some of these decisions / plans / policies / strategies that require the approval of Full Council e.g. Corporate Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Local Plan, will first be examined by the relevant committee, so for example the Statement of Licensing Policy will be reviewed and recommended for approval by the Licensing And Regulatory Committee.</p> <p>The Committees operate on a three monthly cycle with the exception of PFDC which holds an additional meeting to consider the budget proposals for the following year.</p>
<b>Portfolios</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	Not applicable.
<b>Delegated Responsibilities</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	As set out in Part 3 1 the Constitution

### 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	
<b>Internal Scrutiny</b>	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.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i></li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>OWBC had a formal Overview and Scrutiny Committee which was disbanded in 2014. The reasoning behind this move was that Members felt that the committee no longer served any useful purpose and that each committee could scrutinise its own work.</p> <p>In order to ensure that there was an adequate level of scrutiny Council determined to ensure that as many members as possible are included in the decision making process to ensure better outcomes.</p>
	<b>Statutory Function</b>	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?
<b>Planning</b>	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>The Planning Committee currently has 14 members.</p> <p>Whilst the Planning Committee is scheduled to meet 12 times per year there is a Chair's discretion to cancel the meeting where there are no substantive applications to consider.</p> <p>98% of applications are delegated to officers which is indicative of the urbanised nature of the Borough with the majority of applications being householder applications.</p> <p>The Constitution at Part 3 sets out the matters reserved to Planning Committee for decision and includes an ability for members to request a matter is determined by committee where certain parameters are met.</p>
<b>Licensing</b>	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i></li> </ul>



		<p>➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i></p>
	Analysis	<p>The Licensing and Regulatory Committee currently has 10 members and they are appointed by Full Council on an annual basis.</p> <p>The Committee meets on a quarterly basis to receive update reports and consider policies within its remit.</p> <p>Officers have an extensive range of delegated powers to approve, refuse, reject or revoke licences/applications etc.</p> <p>Where a Licensing Act 2003 or a Taxi or Private Hire Licence hearing is required the members of the sub-committee are drawn down from the main Committee.</p> <p>Given the relatively small geographic area of the Borough and its limited night time economy, the requirements to call such Licensing Act 2003 sub-committees is infrequent and would number no more than 1-2 per year.</p> <p>There is a similar demand in respect of Taxi or Private Hire licence hearings</p>
<b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i></p>
	Analysis	N/A
<b>External Partnerships</b>		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>➤ <i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i></p>
	Analysis	<p>Some of OWBC's key external partnerships are detailed below:</p> <p><b>Leisure Services Contract</b></p> <p>In November 2014 Full Council approved the award of a twenty year contract (with the option to extend for up to five</p>

additional years) for the management of its Leisure Facilities and Services (Parklands Leisure Centre and Wigston Pool and Fitness Centre) to an external Leisure Operator (Sports and Leisure Management Limited operating under the brand name of Everyone Active).

The Council's Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager acts as the Contract Manager to monitor and performance manage the contract.

In addition, the Council entered into a relationship with Blaby District Council in April 2024 who provide OWBC's Health and Wellbeing 'offering' which is again contract managed by the Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager.

### **Strategic Waste Partnership (SWP)**

Leicestershire has a Strategic Waste Partnership (SWP) which is now named the Leicestershire Strategy Implementation Group (SIG).

The SWP were responsible for overseeing the review and the development of the Leicestershire Resources and Waste Strategy. Now this is complete, the SIG has been formed to ensure key milestones are achieved, key actions are delivered, and targets set are achieved for the management of municipal waste in Leicestershire.

Terms of reference require strategic waste leads from each authority to attend. There is no member representation; this is reported through the Chief Executive lead (Melton BC) and Assistant Director of the County Council.

### **Health Protection Board**

This covers health protection issues and air quality, food, infectious disease, and other data is provided through this group.

### **Event Planning Oversight Group**

This ensures co-ordinated and consistent response to major events in Leicester and Leicestershire.

### **Air Quality and Health Partnership**

This is a Countywide group to share best practice, develop joint initiatives and knowledge around air quality and health.

In addition, members are appointed to the following outside bodies:

- East Midlands Councils
- Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Police and Crime Panel

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Leicestershire Safer Communities Strategy Board</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Local Government Association</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Local Government Information Unit</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Oadby &amp; Wigston Environmental Forum</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Oadby Educational Foundation</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Oadby Village Hall Fund</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Parking and Traffic Regulations Outside London</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Plastic Free Oadby Steering Group</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>University of Leicester Botanic Garden Oversight Board</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Youth Council</u></a></li> </ul>
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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
<b>Community Leadership</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident’s association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	The level and methods of community engagement and leadership undertaken is at the discretion of each Councillor.

Some Borough Councillors have also been elected as County Councillors.

At a corporate level, the Council operates Residents Forums in each of the 3 settlements within the Borough. An elected member is appointed as the Chair of the forum and all of the elected members within that area are invited to attend. There is an open session prior to each meeting which acts as a surgery where members of the public can raise matters on an individual basis with members outside of the public meeting format. Members from other areas of the borough have an open invitation as well. Members of the public have the right to request items are included in the agenda and the Forums are used as an arena to discuss local issues and new policies and initiatives.

The Residents Forums have access to a small amount of funding which enables residents to bid for contributions to local projects that will benefit the area. Final approval of the grant of funds is via PFDC.

In addition, a number of other groups and forums have been established to promote community engagement such as:

- Children and Young Persons Forum
- Community Engagement Forum; and
- The Health and Wellbeing Board
- Senior Citizens Forum

The majority party, opposition group and the Independent Member all engage with the community through newsletters funded independently by those groups/member.

The widespread use of ICT and other channels of communication have reduced the need for residents to rely on Councillors for information about council services – for example, residents no longer need to contact their Councillor to find out about meetings as minutes and agendas are published online. Information about council services is available 24/7 through the Council's website and the public can contact OWBC online, through social media.

Members would say that the enquiries that they receive relate to constituency work and are of a more complex and time consuming nature. (See further below under the analysis section).

In addition, the Council has an active social media presence and an email subscription service with circa 12,500 subscribers which enables targeted messages to be sent..

		<p>OWBC provides a range of support to Councillors to assist them with their role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All new and returning councillors undertake a full induction programme after each Borough election.</li> </ul> <p>The 2023 Member Induction comprised of 11 sessions designed to support Members in their role and covered ‘The Role of the Councillor’ (provided by the Local Government Association), Communications and Media training (including use of social media), Legislative changes since 2019, the Constitution, the Code of Conduct, a Meet the Managers event, Partnership, Safeguarding and Equalities, tours of council premises and the Borough, Scrutiny skills, Charing skills, IT skills and specific council services. Councillors were also provided with an electronic link to the Members Induction Pack (an A-Z of services for future reference).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member Briefings on new legislation or changes in services are also delivered within each year to ensure Members are kept up to date on topics such as Planning, Licensing, Finances, ICT security etc.</li> <li>• Councillors are emailed weekly a Member Bulletin to keep them up to date with news about council services, forthcoming events, partner service updates etc</li> <li>• Councillors are provided with a tablet and email account and are expected to work paperless in relation to meetings.</li> <li>• The Councillors are supported through the Democratic Services Team albeit that there is no single officer with full time responsibility for Member support.</li> </ul> <p><b>Representation on outside bodies</b> Elected Members of OWBC can be appointed to sit on and liaise with outside bodies.</p> <p>These, in the main, tend to be charitable and / or community organisations who support the Council’s work – usually through the priorities of the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>As of September 2024, there are 11 outside bodies in total.</p> <p>There were 13 “appointments” in total across the 11 outside bodies.</p>
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<b>Casework</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>OWBC Councillors engage on a regular basis with their constituents undertaking casework and dealing with enquiries and offering support and guidance. There is no formal recording of the casework or surgeries held by The Council in respect of the constituency work undertaken by them other than queries dealt with via the Members Enquiry system. The number of enquiries fluctuate year on year – the last 2 years averaged circa 250 whilst to date in this year 532 have been submitted.</p>

### Other Issues

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

Whilst we acknowledge the importance of looking forward when contemplating options for OWBC's future Council size, we feel it is also important to recognise how OWBC has changed in the last 20 years.

OWBC has undergone significant and substantial changes in its organisational structure, services, and budget, since the last boundary review 2002. Residents have also changed how they access council services, reducing the need to contact their Councillor in relation to council services, meetings or decisions, and there are fewer services over which Councillors are able to influence. It is Members view that whilst they may attend less formal meetings the workload in dealing with constituency matters has increased and become more complex.

More detail is set out below:

#### **Organisation structure and workforce:**

In 2010 the Council adopted an Organisational Change Policy to re-organise, reduce and re-focus the Council's workforce. This was for the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities, particularly maintaining front line services, in the most cost effective and flexible manner.

Between 2010 and 2013 efficiency savings of £1.12 million were achieved through a combination of deletion of posts, recruitment freezes across the organisation together with partnership working, internal innovation and some externalisation such as audit services. In particular, management posts at Director and Heads of Service level were significantly reduced to below double figures. Senior Management, particularly Heads of Service has reduced further over the years with the Senior Leadership now comprising of the Chief Executive, a Strategic Director, a Chief Finance Officer and three Heads of Service.

Overall FTE staffing numbers have reduced year on year, from 220 in 2012 to 165 this year.

The Council has continued to keep under review its operating model to make efficiency savings through its Sustainability Programme including service reviews, income generation and management of assets. In 2023 the main Council Offices were relocated and downsized as a result of more agile working practices since the Covid19 pandemic, allowing for better and more effective use of council assets, with significant carbon and financial savings over the next 10 years.

Changes in Council Finances: OWBC has been subject to a cumulative reduction in funding of £8.9m or 53.6% since austerity measures began in 2011/12. The Revenue budget in 2010/11 was £16,578,000, compared to £7,676,805 in 2024/25. This has impacted on the number and quality of the services that we provide to the residents in the borough.

In 2011, OWBC determined to retain its housing stock of circa 1,200 units and has outstanding loans to the PWLB of £12.076m which financed the retention.

- OWBC no longer provides a Pest Control Service.
- In 2012 the Internal Audit function was outsourced
- In 2014, the Council contracted out its leisure services (two leisure centres) to an external company for a period of 20 years
- Street parking enforcement has transferred to Leicestershire County Council
- Off Street parking enforcement is contracted out to Harborough District Council
- Funding for Community and Wellbeing services has been reduced by 50%
- Economic Regeneration & Development resources have reduced from 6 days per week to 1.5 days.

Whilst it is recognised that the Council has inherited some additional responsibilities, such as alcohol, gambling and taxi licensing and increased pressures placed on the homelessness service, these changes have been absorbed against an overall reduction in the Council's workforce.

### **Changes in how residents access information and services**

Changes in how residents access information and services since the last boundary review has reduced the need for residents to rely on contacting Councillors directly:

- OWBC opened a Customer Service Centre (CSC) in Wigston in 2015, enabling residents to access council services face to face. The CSC was closed during the Covid19 pandemic and face-to-face contact is now via appointment only, with the majority of contact either on-line or via the telephone. The CSC handled 53,125 calls in the 2023/24 financial year helping people with their enquiries regarding OWBC's services along with processing 14,366 on-line forms.

This includes:

- Receiving advice on housing benefit and council tax reduction, offering assistance with completing on-line application forms if required.
- Submitting planning applications, viewing pending applications on-line, purchasing Ordnance Survey maps and advice on building regulation visits.
- Receiving help with waste management queries such as missed bin collections, assisted collections, recycling and trade waste bags.

- Setting up direct debits for council tax or changing address, taking council tax payments by cheque or debit / credit card.
- Since May 2006, the minutes and agendas for Council meetings have been published on the Council's website.
- Recordings and live streaming of meetings started during Covid and the Council has invested heavily in 'state of the art' equipment to enhance the experience of users and make the recordings and live streams more accessible.
- OWBC has invested in technology to enable residents to access council services and information through its website and to communicate with the Council directly by email and social media.

### **Changes in Councillor workloads:**

As previously stated the above measures have reduced the need for residents to contact Councillors in relation to council services, meetings and decisions allowing Councillors to focus on constituency work. Councillors are issued with tablet PCs to reduce the need for paper committee documents and improve their accessibility and communication and the Council has its own VPN which enables agile working by both officers and members.

Whilst the Council may have reduced in terms of staffing structures, office space, funding, and services delivered, it has emerged as a strong, proactive and forward looking organisation with a culture of continuous improvement and a track record of grasping opportunities to participate in pilot schemes to help shape the future of local government.

OWBC has also successfully delivered several major projects, including:

- Bidding and receiving £1.8 million in external funding for retrofitting energy saving measures under the LAD1, LAD2 and HUG schemes
- Accommodation move Brocks Hill
- The in-sourcing of the Council's ICT provision

The Council's success has also been recognised, having received the Customer Service Excellence Award for 4 successive years.

### **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 election in May 2023 resulted in both a new Leader and Deputy Leader being appointed since when there has been some slight change in the Governance arrangements with the merging of the Environment Working Group with the Place Shaping Group and changes in the numbers on committees to create a better balance and 'workload' spread whilst maintaining sufficient scrutiny.

The new Local Plan indicates that housebuilding in the main is likely to come forward in the electoral wards of Oadby Grange; Oadby Uplands; Oadby Woodlands; Oadby Brocks Hill;



Wigston Meadowcourt; and Wigston All Saints which is likely to result in an imbalance in the electorate in those wards vis a vis other wards, which we believe could be dealt with through adjusting ward boundaries.

There is a particular issue with the South Wigston Ward which has seen considerable growth over the past 20 years. The Ward is separated from Wigston by the Leicester to London Mainline and then further divided as the Leicester to Burton line runs through the centre of the Ward.

It is suggested that given the peculiar geography of the ward and that it is currently already physically divided, it would be appropriate to have 2 two member wards representing the area thereby increasing the number of Councillors by 1. Given the social deprivation and health inequalities that this ward suffers from (Please see page 4 above) the workload for South Wigston Members is more complex than some of the other Members.

The current electorate is 44,278 which provides a ratio of 1 member to 1700 as an average constituents which appears to be manageable with the exception of South Wigston where the ratio is 2,043. An additional member for South Wigston would produce a ratio of circa 1500 per member.

As the Council operates a committee system and has done since 1974 it is unlikely that there will be any to the governance arrangements. Members consider that the current size provides a robust decision making framework, adequate scrutiny and effective community leadership.