

West Lancashire Borough Council

Council Size Submission

West Lancashire Borough Council

Contents

How to Make a Submission.....	2
About You	2
Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)	3
Local Authority Profile	4
Council Size	6
Other Issues.....	17

How to Make a Submission

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

About You

3. The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, or an individual.
 - 3.1 This submission sets out the response of the Our West Lancashire Group on West Lancashire Borough Council to the LGBCE's invitation to put forward a case for Council Size.
 - 3.2 At the meeting of Full Council on 22 July 2020 it was resolved that the Council would maintain elections by Thirds. It must be noted this was the view only of the majority group on the council. The Conservative and Our West Lancashire Groups wished to move to all-out elections or elections by halves to retain small single-member wards that better reflect the rural nature of parts of the Borough.
 - 3.3 The Our West Lancashire Group was represented on the Electoral Review Working Group (ERWG) which considered the council size matter and has had the benefit of the assessment of the work of the Council, and the roles and responsibilities of its elected members prepared by council officers and which informed the submission of West Lancashire Borough Council.
 - 3.4 Our West Lancashire considers that a council size of 39 Councillors, elected by thirds, will be able to secure effective local government. However, we have concerns that three-member wards elected by thirds will make the subsequent task of maintaining strong community identities and interests in the Borough more difficult when ward boundaries are drawn. For that reason, we favour all out elections so that wards in rural areas do not have to cover very extensive geographical areas. We recognise also that all-out elections are the 'direction of travel' in local government.
 - 3.5 We note that the decision to maintain elections by thirds was not unanimous and does not have the support of the two opposition groups and may be changed after the May 2021 elections.

- 3.6 We note that the Council's submission makes a request for some two member wards to allow for more concise representation of the Borough's rural communities that would otherwise be subsumed into overly large three member wards which may cross several parish and town boundaries, therefore not reflecting community identity. We have sympathy with this stance, however we note that it is not a position that the LGBCE would typically approve and the Our West Lancashire Group would favour all-out elections so that single member or two member wards can be retained.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

4. Please explain the authority's reasons for requesting this electoral review; it is useful for the Commission to have context. *NB/ If the Commission has identified the authority for review under one of its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*
- 4.1 West Lancashire Borough Council (the Council) last underwent a boundary review in 1999/2000 as part of the Local Government Commission for England's programme of Periodic Electoral Reviews (PERs). The Local Government Commission for England has since been superseded by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
- 4.2 The 1999/2000 review resulted in a reduction in Wards and Councillors from 26 to 25 and 55 to 54 respectively.
- 4.3 At the meeting of full Council on 17 October 2018 the following was resolved;
- A. That this council believes:
- 1) That the potential for radical restructuring of Council governance exists within the Sustainable Organisation Review Process, and should therefore be considered at this point in time.
 - 2) That it is appropriate that the role and number of elected members be considered equally alongside those of officers within the review process.
 - 3) That a concomitant review of governance and service delivery will provide the best opportunity for innovative changes across the council and the way in which its services are delivered at a local level.
 - 4) That the new Target Operating Model, to be presented to Council in July 2019, will provide clear guidance as to the potential for revising the political management structure.

B. That this Council resolves:

1) To commence an electoral review process, to review the Council's size, numbers of councillors and ward boundaries, following consideration of the SORP review and the agreement of the new Target Operating Model in July 2019.

2) To authorise officers to make initial contact with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to establish timescales and likely issues arising from an electoral review and assess the resource provision required.

4.4 Separately, on 14 June 2019 the Commission wrote to WLBC advising that a review of West Lancashire would be undertaken as part of their new programme of periodic reviews of authorities who have not been reviewed for 12 or more years.

4.5 On 25 June and 22 July 2019, the Chief Executive and Borough Solicitor respectively, wrote to the Commission confirming the Council's wish to be included in the Commission's review programme given its coincidence with the Council's motion of October 2018.

Local Authority Profile

5. Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description may cover all, or some of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraint for example that may affect the review?
- Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
- Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transitional populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

5.1 West Lancashire is predominantly a rural borough which lies at the heart of the North West of England, located within easy reach of Manchester and Liverpool, and easily accessed by the M6 and the M58. One of 12 districts in Lancashire, the area stretches from the outskirts of Liverpool, Knowsley, and St Helens in the south to the River Ribble in the north, with Southport and Sefton to the west and Wigan, South Ribble and Chorley to the east.

5.2 In 2012 the Borough population was around 111,000 residents. The Borough is home to over 4,000 businesses and supports around 45,000 jobs.

5.3 The Borough is a mixture of small picturesque villages together with the larger market town of Ormskirk, and the town of Skelmersdale, combining business districts, central and local shopping centres, with green space, woodlands and the greatest amount of Green Belt designated land in England.

- 5.4 Outside of the urban centres of Ormskirk and Skelmersdale all parts of the Borough are represented by Parish/Town Councils or a Parish Meeting.
- 5.5 West Lancashire has a diverse population in terms of age with some communities having a markedly older population (Aughton, Parbold/Newburgh and Tarleton) with others being the home to households with younger children (Skelmersdale). The borough is also home to Edge Hill University which has more than 22,000 students, most of whom live in the area – the population of Ormskirk has a high level of 18-24 year olds because of this. The 2011 census has shown that West Lancashire has a generally ageing population – a 23% rise in those over 65 in a ten year period.
- 5.6 The ethnicity of residents is almost entirely White British – around 5% of the population in Skelmersdale declared themselves to be White Other which could reflect the Eastern European community living and working in the area. There are very small numbers of residents who have other ethnicities (less than one half of one percent) and these live across the borough. Less than 1% of residents have a mixed ethnicity. In the most recent census, 76% of residents declared themselves to be Christian with 17% stating that they do not follow a religion. The remaining 7% of the population have beliefs that include Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism.
- 5.7 The gender of the borough is relatively balanced overall with 52% of the population identifying as female.
- 5.8 More than 20% of the population of West Lancashire consider that their day-to-day activities are limited by health which is significantly higher than the national average. Almost 12,000 residents have a hearing impairment and just short of 2,000 adults have a visual impairment. More than 2,000 resident adults have a learning disability. 12% of the population are found to have a common mental health disorder including depression and anxiety.
- 5.9 The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 show the very significant differences in deprivation levels in the Borough. Two wards (Aughton Park and Parbold) are among the 10% least deprived wards in the entire country with 5 more in the 20% least deprived wards in the country (Newburgh, Rufford, Tarleton, Wrightington and Derby). Set against this, there are 5 wards that are among the 10% most deprived wards in the country (Birch Green, Digmoor, Tanhouse, Moorside and Skelmersdale North). These large disparities pose many challenges with different communities of interest.

Council Size

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

Strategic Leadership

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

Topic		
Governance Model	Key lines of explanation	<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 have represents is most appropriate for the authority.</i>
	Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Our West Lancashire Group have tried to construct a governance model that reflects the type of council we would establish from scratch if we were starting now. • We would retain the 'new style' Leader and Cabinet Executive (England) model which the council has operated since May 2011 but with a reduction in cabinet size to reflect the reduction we also propose in the overall number of councillors. • There are currently 54 Councillors and the Our West Lancashire Group would propose to reduce this number by 15 to 39 from 2023. This reduction would put West Lancashire around the lower quintile of our CIPFA Nearest Neighbours. A reduction to 39 councillors would mean an Electors per Councillor Ratio of approximately 2309 in 2027, once again around the upper quintile of our CIPFA Nearest Neighbour authorities. • There are currently no plans to change to a different governance model at this time, however should West Lancashire decide to change to a Committee structure, the Our West Lancashire group is confident that this could be accommodated within the proposed reduced number of Councillors as some of our CIPFA Nearest Neighbour authorities, such as Newark & Sherwood (39 Members), operate under different governance structures with a similar number of councillors to our proposal.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Our West Lancashire group would propose that a cabinet of 7 councillors would be most conducive in this structure for effective decision making. The current Cabinet consists of 9 Councillors, but this is the highest number we can recall. Indeed, the cabinet operated effectively with between 6 and 8 councillors during the entire 16-year period from at least 2004 to 2020. In the Our West Lancashire Group proposals, the remaining 32 councillors would be appointed to the Council's two Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Regulatory Committees for Planning, Licensing, & Governance. We would merge the Standards Committee into the Governance Committee and reduce the number of Working Groups to better balance workloads and sharpen focus.
Portfolios	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i>
	Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Current ruling Labour Group have increased the size of the cabinet. The Council has experience of operating successfully in the past with a cabinet of 6 members and we note that Dover District Council one of the CIPFA near neighbours operates with a 7-member cabinet. A smaller cabinet has the benefit of reducing the risk of service based 'silos' developing and would be intended to develop the more strategic cross service approach that the restructuring of the officer senior management structure has undergone following the SORP project which commenced in late 2019 and is currently underway. An example of how a 7-member cabinet could be constructed is below: Leader & Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources Leisure, Health and Wellbeing Housing and Landlord Services Street Scene Transformation and Human Resources Planning The positions of Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member, although not deemed to be considered as full time positions, do require a substantial commitment given the level of responsibility and significant additional time that needs to be spent to undertake those roles effectively. However, the council has

		<p>successfully operated with a smaller number of cabinet members in the past and a reduction to the number of councillors as a whole should not impact greatly on the workload of the cabinet members as the split between cabinet and non-cabinet members is well defined in the Council's constitution. The Our West Lancashire Group would propose that the Independent Remuneration Panel review the new arrangements after 12 months and make proposals for any alterations to councillor and special responsibility allowances as a result of the changes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 5 scheduled formal meetings of Cabinet each year, 5 scheduled informal meetings and 5 Cabinet Briefing Meetings. Additional meetings are also held when required. This pattern works well and would be retained. • All of the Council's functions are exercised by the Executive arm of the Council unless the law makes specific provision to the contrary. Where the law provides the Council with a choice, the council's constitution determines whether a function may be exercised by the Cabinet. Executive decisions are mainly taken by the Cabinet as a whole or by Officer Delegation given by the Leader, usually in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder. The Our West Lancashire Group does not favour widespread decision-making by individual portfolio holders, preferring the whole cabinet to take executive decisions or the current officer delegation practice. The proposed reduction to 39 Councillors would not adversely affect how this process works, whilst also maintaining a manageable workload for members of the executive.
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i>
	Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Scheme of delegation to Executive Members and Officers can be found in Constitution 4.2 via https://democracy.westlancs.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CIId=305&info=1&MD=Constitution • The Our West Lancashire Group does not favour widespread decision-making by individual portfolio holders, preferring the whole cabinet to take executive decisions or the current officer delegation practice. • All councillors are involved in making major decisions relating to budget setting and policy through Full Council and that would be unchanged by the council size. We would not alter the definition of a key decision under the Council's constitution. Cabinet will continue to take decisions under the policy

		framework while councillors sitting on planning and licensing committees take decisions with important ramifications for the Borough and those living and working within it.
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Accountability

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

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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>
Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is currently undertaking a separate review of its Overview and Scrutiny functions but current arrangements are based on two Scrutiny Committees and a Member Development Commission. The scrutiny arrangements of the Council have been in place since 2002 and are currently undergoing review by the Member Development Commission. The Commission has recommended that the two main scrutiny committees are retained with a move to pre-decision scrutiny with the Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting prior to the Cabinet meeting rather than subsequently. The Our West Lancashire Group supports this change to pre-scrutiny. <p>The Council Size submission from the Borough Council describes the role and functions of the Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee; the Corporate and Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Member Development Commission.</p>

Task and Finish Groups

- Task and finish groups, locally referred to as Working Groups are created ad-hoc to undertake reviews on particular matters. The membership of each task and finish group will likely include a mix of Councillors, including (but not limited to) members of the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- Recommendations from task and finish groups are either carried out by officers under existing delegation arrangements or referred to Cabinet and Council as appropriate for approval.
- There are currently 9 task and finish groups and the Our West Lancashire Group would review this with a view to reducing the number. The number of groups have grown in recent years at the instigation of the ruling group. They are not subject to the rules of political balance or the publication of agendas, reports and minutes. The views of opposition groups are sometimes excluded. A review and reduction in number with work transferred to the scrutiny committees in some cases would be preferable for decision making. There is no set number for the membership of working groups, although they tend to range between 5 and 9 councillors.
- There are currently 5 meetings of the Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee each year, 4 meetings of the Corporate & Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee and at least 2 meetings of the Member Development Commission (although additional meetings of the Commission have been held to undertake the Overview & Scrutiny Function review).
- A full list of current meeting dates and times can be found via the following link: <https://democracy.westlancls.gov.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>
- The Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate & Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee both have 11 members each currently. The Member Development Commission currently has 6 members. These numbers are appropriate for the reduced council size as it would allow most non-cabinet members to be a member of one regulatory and one scrutiny committee allowing all councillors to have an important decision-making role outside of full council. Currently some councillors serve only on a scrutiny committee.

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	Key lines of explanation	<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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2019/20 94.4% of applications were determined by officers under delegated powers. It is envisioned that this figure will increase or remain the same in coming years, pending the progress of the Planning for the Future White Paper. • In the four years between 2016/17 and 2019/20 the percentage of applications determined by officers under delegated powers grew by 1.5%. Over the same period the number of planning applications being determined overall, by both officers and planning committee has declined by 9.2%. Under the current planning regime it is likely that this trend will continue before levelling off. <table border="1" data-bbox="555 943 2123 1361"> <thead> <tr> <th>Period</th> <th>Total Number of Planning Applications Determined</th> <th>Number of Planning Applications Determined by Planning Committee</th> <th>% of Planning Applications Determined by Planning Committee</th> <th>Number of Planning Applications Determined under Delegated Powers</th> <th>% of Planning Applications Determined under Delegated Powers</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1 Apr 2019 – 31 Mar 20</td> <td>790</td> <td>44</td> <td>5.6%</td> <td>746</td> <td>94.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 Apr 2018 – 31 Mar 19</td> <td>816</td> <td>56</td> <td>6.9%</td> <td>760</td> <td>93.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 Apr 2017 – 31 Mar 18</td> <td>845</td> <td>67</td> <td>7.9%</td> <td>778</td> <td>92.1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					Period	Total Number of Planning Applications Determined	Number of Planning Applications Determined by Planning Committee	% of Planning Applications Determined by Planning Committee	Number of Planning Applications Determined under Delegated Powers	% of Planning Applications Determined under Delegated Powers	1 Apr 2019 – 31 Mar 20	790	44	5.6%	746	94.4%	1 Apr 2018 – 31 Mar 19	816	56	6.9%	760	93.1%	1 Apr 2017 – 31 Mar 18	845	67	7.9%	778
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		1 Apr 2016 – 31 Mar 17	860	61	7.1%	799	92.9%
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a single Council-wide Planning Committee with 11 Members. • Executive members are not prohibited from being a member although in the view of the Our West Lancashire Group the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Planning should be prohibited, although they cannot be Chairman. The council size of 39 which the Our West Lancashire Group propose with a reduced 7-member cabinet will not necessitate that more executive members are permanent members of the Planning Committee and so not increase workloads. • There are 10 meetings of Planning Committee per year along with associated site visits and preparatory work. The time commitment is dependent on the complexity of applications and the site visits required. • The Planning for the Future white paper has signalled possible major changes to the planning system and this could fundamentally change the role and function of the Council's Planning Committee. It would appear from these proposals that a reduction in the overall number of Councillors to 39 as proposed by the Our West Lancashire Group would not be adversely impacted by these white paper proposals but the committee size and functions could be altered in the future through a decision of Full Council. 					
Licensing	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i> ➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i> 					
	Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are on average 15 licensing panels held each year split across a Licencing & Gambling Committee and also a Licencing & Appeals Committee (separate committees as required by law). This includes both the main Committee hearings and also meetings of sub-committees and appeals. • The Licensing and Gambling Committee as a whole has a light workload and only meets as required to discuss policy matters relating to liquor licencing and gambling while a number of Premises Licence applications have also been dealt with under the non-hearing procedure. 					

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Our West Lancashire Group would propose a smaller Licensing and Gambling Committee comprising 9 members (currently 15 members). • The time commitment of members will vary based on the nature of the application, as well as the requirement for any site visits. • Meetings of ad-hoc panels take place during the year when there is an objection or appeal. • There is a core group of members assigned to the main Committees with members of the sub-committees being drawn from this group.
<p style="text-align: center;">Other Regulatory Bodies</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<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>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Our West Lancashire Group considers that the current split between Audit and Governance and Standards Committee should end. In recent times Audit and Governance meetings have been cancelled with little or no explanation and the profile of Governance within the Committee's remit needs to be raised. A single Committee encompassing the work of the existing Standards Committee and termed the Governance Committee to reflect the priority on ensuring effective Governance of the council including standards of conduct. • This new Governance Committee would comprise 11 members and meets 5 times a year. • The functions of the existing Standards Committee are set out in Article 9 of the Council's Constitution. https://democracy.westlancs.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=305&info=1&MD=Constitution <p>The functions of the existing Audit & Governance Committee are set out in Section 4.1 of the Council's Constitution. https://democracy.westlancs.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=305&info=1&MD=Constitution</p>

		<p>Independent Persons are required by legislation in relation to matters relating to Councillor Conduct under the Standards regime.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council has two independent persons. They are not members of the existing Standards Committee but are invited to its meetings and they regularly attend. They would continue to be invited to the proposed new Governance Committee.
External Partnerships	Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.	
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i> 	
Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of councillors are appointed as the Council's representatives on a range of different local, regional and national external organisations. The list of such bodies can be found at the following link; https://democracy.westlancs.gov.uk/mgListOutsideBodies.aspx?bcr=1 There are currently 24 members, mostly from the leading group, that are appointed to outside bodies. The workload will vary depending on the outside body appointed to and the nature of work that they undertake. For some of these external organisations at a regional and county level, it is appropriate that the Leader, Deputy Leader or relevant Portfolio Holder represents the Council. However, for others including the positions on local voluntary and charitable organisations the positions are awarded on a patronage basis solely by the Council Leader. Furthermore, the council representatives do not formally report back to the Borough Council in any way. The Our West Lancashire Group would review representation on these other more local bodies to reduce councillor workload with the smaller council size we propose. 	

Community Involvement

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

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> ➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i> ➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i> ➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i> ➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i>
	Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In many cases Councillors are community leaders and will frequently take an active involvement in local community groups and parish councils, be that as actual members of the groups/parish councils or as active contributors. This is in addition to their role in undertaking casework and more general engagement with their constituents. • The Council does not currently have area Committees but this is an area that the Our West Lancashire Group would wish to explore and consult with local communities upon. The diverse make-up of the Borough and the extremes reflected in many measures including the Indices of Multiple Deprivation underline that more detailed consideration should be given to whether area committees of elected councillors from those areas with some decision-making authority should be established. The Our West Lancashire group would promote such a consultation to follow, if these proposals for council size were accepted. • It is down to the individual member as to how they engage their constituents. Many members may hold surgeries, attend public meetings, visit constituents and engage in traditional door to door canvassing. Increasingly though contact is made virtually through the use of social media and other digital channels.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors are members of various external bodies that allow for this engagement to take place. • Several Councillors are involved each year in events that take place with local schools during Local Democracy Week and throughout the year. • Members are not expected to attend or be members of such groups and their meetings, but they are encouraged to do so as part of their representative role. Councillors with specific responsibilities may be asked, or attend of their own accord, meetings of various local or regional organisations and community groups. • Councillors who represent Wards with Parish Councils may also sit as members of those Parish Councils or provide updates to them on their work. We currently have 13 Councillors who are also Parish Councillors. • The Council does not currently operate an area governance structure. • A reduction to 39 members serving 13 Wards (down from the current 25) would mean members representing more residents within much larger wards than they presently are. Within the geography of West Lancashire this would increase the size of wards, particularly in the rural areas of the Borough to a very large extent. It is for that reason in particular that the Our West Lancashire Group would favour all-out elections to retain single-member and 2 member wards, a position favoured also by the Conservative Group and a policy stance of the Council which may alter after the May 2021 elections.
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>
	Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is often a difference of approach depending the experience and other considerations of the individual member. Whilst not in every case, more experienced members or those with specific responsibilities will often take a more direct role in dealing with casework themselves. There remains a significant amount of casework that is passed to officers to action but this is generally an appropriate response to the variety of issues raised. • The Council has established a 'Patch Problem' protocol which provides Members with a tracking and monitoring facility when reporting issues in their individual Wards.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members receive support in a variety of ways, both internal and external to the Council. Internally this will include officer support and an extensive member training programme. Externally members may receive support from their ward colleagues, party colleagues and the local/regional party office should one exist. • Since the last review of the Council 20 years ago technological advancement has had a significant impact on the way members work and interact with their electorate. • As part of the Council's digital strategy and the introduction of paperless meetings, all members have a laptop or iPad to enable them to access their papers digitally, along with receiving and sending out emails and telephone calls. Meetings are also currently held virtually and broadcast to the public via the internet when appropriate. • A reduction to 39 members as proposed would be reflective of these technological advances and the ability of members to communicate with their constituents in a wide variety of ways, whilst acknowledging the role officers play in assisting members with their casework.
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Other Issues

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

Financial Issues

The submission from West Lancashire Borough Council at 10.1-10.9 details the financial pressures the council has had to address and still, to some extent, faces. In that context we would point out to the Commission that in December 2010 the council had 572.06 permanent staff. In April 2021 the figure will be 458.32 i.e. a reduction of 20%. Further staff reductions are highly likely.

It is in that context that the Our West Lancashire Group believes that the council size should also be considered and that our proposal for a council of 39 councillors is appropriate. In our survey of local residents, a proposal to reduce councillor numbers by one-third i.e. to 36 received support from more than 80% of survey respondents.

As the Council's submission at 10.9 remarks, whilst this review is not being undertaken with financial savings at the forefront of considerations, a reduction to 39 members as proposed would represent a potential saving of £72,600 each year from the year after the implementation of the outcome of the review, based on current Members Basic Allowance (£4842.00 per Member).

Difficulty recruiting candidates to be Councillors

There has been a difficulty recruiting candidates who wish to be councillors in West Lancashire. This difficulty in recruitment resulted in a councillor being elected who simultaneously was an elected Borough councillor in another Lancashire Borough. It also results in husband and wife or domestic partner teams becoming councillors. Currently there are three husband and wife teams and one domestic partnership on the Council. In the recent past, three people from the same nuclear family were councillors at the same time and all three of these councillors served on the planning committee.

The difficulty in recruiting candidates is also manifested in the number of councillors who “double hat” being both Borough and County Councillors. Currently there are three, but this has been as many as six at one point. This leads to numerous conflicts of interest.

Outsourcing

The Council currently outsources a number of services to third party providers, including; ICT, Revenues and Benefits, payroll and the running of leisure centres.

Members retain oversight of these services through appointments to outside bodies as detailed above. Reports and updates to members are also provided to the scrutiny committees, Cabinet and Full Council.

A review of the above contracts is being undertaken and decisions will be made as to whether services are to be brought back in house but it is not felt that a reduction in overall council size to 39 as proposed would negatively impact oversight of these services.

Summary

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

11.1 The Our West Lancashire Group on West Lancashire Borough Council has carried out an assessment of the work of the Council, and the roles and responsibilities of its elected members. It has reviewed the operation of the Council from first principles and considered the

structure required to deliver effective leadership both strategic and community and ensure accountability if the council was to be established afresh. Where public consultation would be required for certain changes e.g. area committees this has been identified for the future.

- 11.2 The Our West Lancashire Group on West Lancashire Borough Council considers that a council size of 39 Councillors will be able to secure effective local government in the Borough going forward.
- 11.3 Maintaining elections by thirds will however mean significant change from the current electoral geography of the Borough – a mixture of 1, 2 and 3 member wards and for this reason the Our West Lancashire Group would favour all-out elections.
- 11.4 The request from the Borough Council for some two member wards is supported by the Our West Lancashire Group as it allows for more concise representation of the Borough's rural communities that would otherwise be subsumed into overly large three member wards which may cross several parish and town boundaries.
- 11.5 The Our West Lancashire Group on West Lancashire Borough Council at its meeting of 22 February 2021 approved the making of this submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.