

## **Introduction**

**This submission is made on behalf of the Wiltshire Council Liberal Democrat Group.**

The Liberal Democrat Group consists of 20 Councillors all elected in competitive contests in May 2017 representing diverse communities across Wiltshire. As such, the Liberal Democrat Group constitutes the main opposition to the ruling Conservatives, a role the Liberal Democrats have undertaken in the two previous administrations of the Council (2009-'13 and 2013-'17).

## **Summary of the Liberal Democrat Group submission**

**We, the Liberal Democrat Group on Wiltshire Council propose that a council size of 86 members is the most appropriate to enable Wiltshire Council ('The Council') to provide effective, representative and appropriate local government within Wiltshire.**

Our submission and proposed number of Councillors takes into account the Council's governance arrangements, its regulatory and scrutiny functions and the representational role of councillors. It also takes account of our Council's devolved way of working in 18 community areas known as Area Boards.

As you will see, we part company with the submission of Wiltshire Council. In proposing a smaller number of Councillors going forward. Our figure is 86, a reduction of 12 from the current number of 98 Councillors. This represents a reduction of 12.28% in Councillor numbers from the current position.

We make this recommendation for two principal reasons.

The first is that our full analysis on the relative time weighting of the various roles played by Councillors in the Executive, Scrutiny and in Committees plus their other duties more accurately reflects the operation of the current Council and the most recent commentary on Wiltshire Council as delivered by the Independent Remuneration Panel on Members' Allowances. This argument is set out in Section 1 below.

The second relates to the operation of the Area Board structure and its ability to function perfectly well with four or more Councillors on an Area Board. In the minority of circumstances where Councillor membership of their Area Board falls to three, to use tried, tested and proven arrangements for “twinning” of those Area Boards with one of their neighbouring Area Boards to avoid operational challenges relating to quoracy.

This provision already exists in the Council’s Constitution and is a practice that has operated successfully for the two Area Boards which have had three Councillor members since their inception following the election of the first Wiltshire Unitary Council in 200. The impact of our proposed reduction in the number of Councillors to 86 would increase the number of Area Boards needing to take advantage of this provision in the Council’s Constitution from the current two to four. The discussion of this aspect of our submission can be found in Section 2.

## **1. Relative weighting of various Councillor roles**

The first of these is the relative weighting assessed by our fellow Councillors relating to the roles of Vice Chair of the Council, Cabinet Members and Portfolio Holders, and the Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (other than the Chair). We do not agree that these are full-time, as set out in the submission of the Council.

### **1.1 Vice Chair of the Council**

The role of the Vice Chair is to substitute for the Chair of the Council at ceremonial events and chairing the full meeting of the Council in the absence of the Chair. The post holder may well also take on certain other, more minor ceremonial functions on behalf of the Council.

While these are significant responsibilities an examination of the meetings, and other undertakings made by the Vice Chair, show conclusively that this is a full-time role, unlike that of the Chair itself.

**Consequently, we set the weighting of the Vice Chair’s role at 0.4.**

### **1.2 Cabinet Members**

The Independent Remuneration Panel on Members’ Allowances 2013 report recognised the significant workload of Cabinet Members, assessing these as 31 hours of work per week. However the Special Responsibility Allowance of Cabinet Members was set at 60% of that of the Leader.

**Consequently, we set the weighting of Cabinet Members’ role at 0.9**

### 1.3 Portfolio Holders

In addition to the main Cabinet post holder the Council also operates with Portfolio Holders. The range and scale of the individual tasks of the holders of these posts is variable.

The Independent Remuneration Panel on Members' Allowances noted in [2013](#) during a review that these Portfolio Holders "*held significant responsibilities and required a significant time commitment*". The report assessed this extra time commitment as "*20 hours a week*"

The report went on to note that "*the Cabinet member is still the decision maker and ultimately holds responsibility for any decision taken.*"

A review by the Independent Remuneration Panel in 2017 maintained the level of special responsibility allowance for the Portfolio Holders set at 22.5% of the Special Responsibility Allowance of the Leader. As such this is significantly less than that for the roles of Cabinet Members, the Chairman of the Council, and the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. In part this also recognises the lower time commitment and responsibility of this role.

It is appropriate to recognize the role of the Portfolio Holder by weighting the role but that cannot be set at the same level as the Leader or Chair of the Council. It seems sensible that this should be set at one third of that of their respective Cabinet Member.

**Consequently, we set the weighting of the Portfolio Holders role at 0.3**

### 1.4 Chair of Overview & Scrutiny and its Committee Members

The role of Chair of Scrutiny is a very important one in the effective running and scrutiny of the Council. This role takes on a greater workload than those of the other members of this important Committee.

**Consequently, we believe the weighting of the Chair's role at 1 and the rest of the Committee Members at 0.9.**

The full range of roles and Committee places, their respective weighting factor, the number of members to perform these roles and places, and cumulative total of the Councillors required is set out below in Table 1 on Page 3.

### 1.5 Councillors available to serve on Scrutiny Committees

We recognise that the elected Members that hold posts of Chair, Vice Chair, Leader, Deputy Leader, Cabinet and Portfolio holders cannot serve on the Council's four Scrutiny Committees (marked \*). This excludes 24 of the 86 Members that we believe should constitute Wiltshire Council. That leaves 64 elected Members to fill the 54 places on these scrutiny committees.

No such restriction applies to the other Committees although their may be time and appropriate practical restrictions that would preclude the Chair and Leader from serving on some. Nevertheless, we believe there are sufficient elected Members available to serve on these committees with a Council of 86.

**Table 1 - Council Elected Member Numbers (to operate a functional Council)**

	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c = a x b</i>	<i>d</i>
	<b>Committee Places and roles</b>	<b>Factor %</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Cumulative Total</b>
Leader	1	1	1	1
Chairman	1	1	1	2
Vice-Chairman	1	0.4	0.4	2.4
Cabinet	9	0.9	8.1	10.5
Portfolio Holders	12	0.3	3.6	14.1
Overview & Scrutiny Chair*	1	1	1	15.1
Overview & Scrutiny Members*	14	0.9	12.6	27.7
Children's Select*	13	0.9	11.7	39.4
Environment Select*	13	0.8	10.4	49.8
Health Select*	13	0.8	10.4	60.2
Strategic Planning	11	0.8	8.8	69
North Area Planning	11	0.3	3.6	70.6
Southern Area Planning	11	0.3	3.3	73.9
Eastern Area Planning	8	0.3	2.4	76.3
Western Area planning	11	0.3	3.3	79.6
Licensing Committee	12	0.3	4.8	84.4
Audit Committee	11	0.1	1	85.4
Standards Committee	11	0	0	86
Appeals Committee	8	0	0	86
Pensions Committee	5	0	0	86
Staffing Policy Committee	9	0	0	86
Officer Appointments Committee	5	0	0	86
Police & Crime Panel Members	7	0	0	86
Area Boards	97	0	0	86

\*not open to Cabinet or Portfolio holders

**Minimum total of elected Members to operate a functional Council**

**86**

## **2. Area Boards**

The second aspect of the Council's submission with which we disagree relates to a specific aspect relating to the Council's Area Boards.

### **2.1 We share the Council's enthusiasm for the delegation of many decisions and service provision to a local level enabled by the existence of 18 Area Boards.**

We also share the view expressed in the Council's submission that it would be advantageous for each of these 18 Area Boards to have at least four members. However, to achieve that it would require a Council in excess of 120 Members. Indeed, to reduce the number of Area Boards operating with less than four Members to a single Area Board would require a Council in excess of 100 Members.

### **2.2 We do not believe that an expansion of Wiltshire Council to those numbers would be conducive to effective decision making or the operation of the Council.**

The current size of the Council at 98 Members means that two of the existing Area Boards operate with three elected Members i.e. Pewsey and Tidworth. It is recognised that this relatively small membership can pose a challenge to the operation of these two Area boards should a Member be unable to attend decision making meetings. Consequently, the Council's Constitution recognises a specific arrangement that applies to the Members of each of these Area Boards that allows one of them to attend and vote at the others meeting should that be required.

### **2.3 The arrangement relating to the Pewsey and Tidworth Area Boards has not been invoked often and has not acted to the detriment of either Area Board in discharging their responsibilities.**

### **2.4 We recognise that our proposal to reduce the number of elected Members to 86 will mean that two more Area Boards will fall from their current elected membership of four to three.**

The two Area Boards concerned are Bradford on Avon and Marlborough (it should be noted that three of the four members of the Bradford on Avon Area Board have expressed their support for the Liberal Democrat Council Group position).

The Liberal Democrat Council Group believe that a similar arrangement to that currently operating between Members of the Pewsey and Tidworth Area Boards could also be applied to the Area Boards of Bradford on Avon and Marlborough and their neighbouring Area Boards; Corsham or Melksham Area Boards in the case of Bradford on Avon, and Calne or Devizes Area Boards in the case of Marlborough.

2.5 Table 2 on Page 6 sets out the current level of elected Members on each Area Board and the impact of the Liberal Democrat Council Group proposal to reduce the total number of Councillors from the current 98 to 86 and the average number of electors per Ward as at 2017 and in 2024.

**Table 2**

**Number of Councillors Per Area Board**

Council Size	98	86
<u>Area Boards</u>	<u>Cllrs Area</u>	<u>Per Board</u>
Amesbury	6	6
Bradford on Avon	4	3
Calne	5	4
Chippenham	10	8
Corsham	4	4
Devizes	6	6
Malmesbury	4	4
Marlborough	4	3
Melksham	6	5
Pewsey	3	3
Royal Wootton Bassett and Cricklade	6	5
Salisbury	9	8
South West	5	4
Southern	5	4
Tidworth	3	3
Trowbridge	9	8
Warminster	5	4
Westbury	4	4
Average Voters Per	3,752	4,834
Division	(2017)	(2024)

### 3. Conclusions

#### 3.1 Size of the Council

**The evidence set-out above demonstrates that a Wiltshire Council comprising of 86 elected Members is sufficient to enable the Council to perform successfully both its executive and scrutiny functions, as well as all its other statutory requirements.**

#### 3.2 Area Boards

To enable all 18 Area Boards to have four or more elected Members would require the expansion of the total number of elected Members to in excess of 120. This number of elected Members would not be conducive to the effective operation of the Council.

Clearly the submission made by Wiltshire Council recognises this as it does not propose such an increase. Consequently, Wiltshire Council acknowledges and the history of the two Area Boards concerned show that it is perfectly possible to operate a small number of Area Boards successfully with three elected Members.

The number of 86 Councillors that we propose also allows 14 of the 18 Area Boards to function with at least four elected Members.

At 86 elected Members, the number Area Boards operating with three elected Members will double from two to four. However, Wiltshire Council has managed successfully with two Area Boards operating with three elected Members for the past eight years.

**We believe the modest expansion from two to four Area Boards with only three elected Members can be accommodated.**

This will be by a similar arrangement already recognised in the Council's Constitution and operating successfully, to allow elected Members of neighbouring Area Boards to join their colleagues should an issue of quoracy arise to frustrate the effective operation of their respective Area Boards.

Wiltshire Council Liberal Democrat Councillor Group

12 March 2018