

Dacorum Borough Council

# Council Size Submission:

This report is the submission of Dacorum Borough Council (the Council) to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on its proposals for Council Size.

February 2024

## **About You**

This submission is made on behalf of Dacorum Borough Council and was agreed at full Council on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024

### **Reason for Review:**

The Commission identified the Council was due for review as the last review was carried out in 2006.

### **The Context for the proposal:**

#### **Electorate changes since 2006**

The Boundary Commission's last review of the Council's size and ward boundaries reported in 2006. The Council adopted the Leader and Executive model in 2001 and this model has since been embedded within the work of the Executive as part of the Council's wider governance framework

At the start of the last review in 2006, 52 councillors represented 106,238 electors, an electoral ratio of 2043; the review at that time reduced the number of councillors to 51.

In 2016 the number of electors had risen to 107,108 and in December 2022 there were 112,155 registered voters (excluding overseas voters), giving an electoral ratio of 2199.

This is likely to increase by approximately 12,000 to 124,239 by 2030, an electoral ratio of 2436. This figure is based on planned housing development mainly in Hemel Hempstead as set out in the draft Local Plan, which includes significant growth planned through the Hemel Garden Communities project.

#### **Governance, Decision Making and Scrutiny**

Dacorum is made up of 25 wards, comprising 51 councillors. Each ward is represented by a varying number of councillors, the highest being three councillors to a ward, and the lowest being one councillor. Following the local elections in May 2023, the political balance of the Council stands at Liberal Democrat: 28 seats, Conservative: 18 seats, Labour: 3 seats and 2 Independent Members.

All councillors serve on the full Council, which is the sovereign decision making body of the Council and is chaired by the Mayor. The Mayor is elected annually by full Council and is the ceremonial representative of the District and in 2022/23 attended just over 100 external events, raising money for several charities.

The current Leader and Executive governance model has operated effectively since its introduction and there are no plans for it to change in the near future. The model provides

a framework for agile, timely and effective decision-making with scrutiny and policy development support provided by the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Audit Committee.

## **Transference of function and demand since 2006**

There have been significant changes on the demands on local authorities since the last review in 2006, particularly in terms of increased regulatory requirements, the climate change agenda, a step-change in partnership working beyond the Council to both address public service needs and deliver essential transformation, development and growth, and meeting the changing needs and expectations of the public who expect a modern, responsive and transparent service.

Modern forms of communication, via email, mobile phone, video conferencing and the greater use of social media have made meeting the changing demands on local authorities and councillors more efficient even though this technology has also brought greater expectations in terms of the immediacy of response.

These challenges, coupled with the widely recognised public sector funding pressures and the need to increase revenue, has meant the Council has had to evolve and adapt governance and departmental structures in order to meet these requirements.

The Council has developed an ambitious commercial strategy, internal transformation programme, housing transformation and improvement programme, and climate change programme to ensure that it can meet the changing legislative, environmental and fiscal environment it works within and this requires strong political leadership to lead the change agenda.

The governance structure led by councillors, whilst remaining constant in its overall structure, has adapted many times since the last review in order to meet the changing demands and was most recently amended following the all-out council elections in 2023 to ensure that portfolios align with departmental structures, and to provide the required oversight and political leadership. This review also introduced a new Portfolio for Climate and Ecological Emergency to provide greater focus in that area.

The current pool of 51 members has meant that there continues to be a strong group of talented councillors with diverse knowledge and experience to fill Cabinet positions when required and also to meet the demands of the Council's scrutiny and regulatory committees (see further details on those committees below).

It is the view of the full Council that a reduction in numbers of councillors could lead to there being insufficient numbers of councillors to fill all the Cabinet and Committee vacancies, which would impact on the sound decision making and political leadership that the Council provides.

A reduction in the number of councillors would also add to the existing workload of councillors, who already experience significant demands of time, and this could lead to councillors with work and/or caring responsibilities being unable to perform their roles effectively and could prevent such councillors seeking election or re-election. This is clearly undesirable and the Council needs to ensure that it can attract councillors from all demographics. Further analysis on the time spent by councillors performing their role is

included below, but this has been an important consideration for the Council in recommending an increase in councillors to 53.

### **Governance and capacity issues**

There have been no governance issues raised by any inspectorate or other third party, which have been connected to the number of councillors or the Council's overall governance structure. Attendance at Cabinet and Committees is generally strong with enough members to substitute any absences if required. There have been no issues making any Cabinet or Committee meeting quorate; however, this could become an issue if the number of councillors is reduced to below the current 51.

As set out above, there has been steady, but not significant levels of growth in the electorate since the last review in 2006, which will continue to grow to 2030 and beyond. This will mean that the electorate ratio will have increased by 393 (19%) during the period 2006-2030.

This electorate growth when considered with the changing demands placed on local authorities and higher expectations of residents within the last 20 years does suggest that consideration should be given to a small increase in councillor numbers to ensure that councillors can continue to perform their community leadership, and council representations roles.

The population growth needs to be considered in the context of the changing forms of communications that the Council and councillors use to serve their communities, which makes this much more efficient than it was 20 years ago and enables councillors to perform their community leadership roles to a wider constituency number with a similar amount of time resource.

In terms of governance structure, the base structure has remained unchanged since 2001 and working experience has shown that the current structure works efficiently. The number of councillors required to serve on relevant committees is adequate but a small increase in capacity is desirable to continue to operate the structure and meet the changes in demand to serve the projected increase in population to 2030 and beyond.

It is therefore recommended that councillor numbers are increased by 2 and this would bring the electorate ratio to 2344. This still represents an increase in the ratio of 301 (approx 15%) since the last review, but taking into account of the changes to communication methods and the stable governance framework, it is the view of Council that this is an appropriate number of councillors.

## **Local Authority Profile**

### **Setting and local geography**

Dacorum is a district council with borough status located in Hertfordshire. The modern local government district of Dacorum was created on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1974 under the Local Government act 1972. The district was granted borough status in 1984.

The Council's central office, The Forum is located in Hemel Hempstead town centre. The borough also includes the market towns of Berkhamsted and Tring and surrounding villages.

Dacorum is located just beyond the Greater London area and, as a result, a significant portion (60%) lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The Borough also contains a high percentage of rural land (85%), while much of the countryside is situated within The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The special landscape character of the AONB adds significant value to the environmental quality of the district.

Hemel Hempstead, and the village of Bourne End are unparished areas. The rest of the borough is divided into 16 civil parishes.

## **Demographics and community characteristics**

Dacorum has a population of 155,100 (2021 ONS data) which makes it the largest district in Hertfordshire by population.

The population breakdown by age (Herts Insight 2023) currently is:

- 20.1% children (those aged under 16).
- 62.4% aged 16 to 64.
- 17.5% of people aged 65 and over.

The mid-2043 population predictions for Dacorum as set out below highlight that age demographics are projected towards a higher growth in the 65 and over group compared to other groups:

- 18.5% children (those aged under 16).
- 58.2% aged 16-64.
- 23.3% aged 65 and over.

In terms of its ethnic make-up (2021), 21.3% of Dacorum residents were from an ethnic minority (non-white British). This is slightly lower compared to both England's population (26.5%) and Hertfordshire's population (28.2%).

As a borough, Dacorum has low levels of deprivation.

- The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score for Dacorum is 12.17
- The borough ranks at 261 out of 326 local authority areas, placing it in the 20% least deprived local authority areas in the country. It has no areas in the most deprived 10%.

However, it is important to note that there are several small areas (LSOAs) throughout the borough where deprivation is very apparent. The 5 wards with the highest deprivation rate in 2021 were Highfield, Grovehill, Warners End, Corner Hall which are all in Hemel Hempstead and Hemel Hempstead Town ward itself. Representation in these areas and other areas with high levels of deprivation such as Adeyfield and Woodhall Farm, bring significant demands and challenges for councillors with more direct involvement on housing related and welfare issues in particular.

This does not necessarily mean that areas of deprivation require greater representation than other wards as more affluent areas bring different but equally demanding challenges in areas such as planning, standards and other regulatory matters.

Crime in Dacorum is relatively low in comparison to county, regional and national averages. There were 63.3 crimes per 1,000 residents in Dacorum, which is lower than England's 83.9

## **Economy**

Dacorum added £4,453 million into the national economy in 2019. Ranking Dacorum fourth in gross value added (GVA) when comparing the 10 districts in Hertfordshire.

There were approximately 134,000 jobs in Dacorum in 2021 and 76.6% of the working aged population were employed in 2022.

In 2022, the average annual pay for Dacorum residents is £29,431. This is slightly higher than the average annual pay across England of £28,000.

The largest industry in Dacorum is the wholesale and retail trade and the largest occupation types in Dacorum are professional occupations.

The above statistics demonstrate that Dacorum is a relatively affluent borough with strong economic performance and relatively lower levels of deprivation and crime incidents.

## **Constraints and challenges ahead**

Local government remains under financial pressure and this has resulted in Dacorum needing to reconsider capital spending projects, find savings and generate additional revenue, whilst continuing to deliver on its priorities.

The effects of Covid-19, and high inflation have had a significant impact on the council's finances and reduced reserves. This will continue to impact Council decision-making and priorities in the short-medium term as the Council plans for the future.

Housing growth is planned throughout the borough, with the largest growth planned through the Hemel Garden Communities project in Hemel Hempstead, but the planned growth is not expected to significantly change the demographics in any one group by 2030.

Dacorum retains ownership of its council housing stock, which consists of approximately 10,200 homes, 2000 of which are sheltered housing for older people. Dacorum also own the freehold for approximately 1800 leasehold flats. The housing stock continues to generate significant demand on the Council's staff and councillors to ensure that the Council's stock is maintained to a good standard and regulatory compliance achieved whilst balancing the Housing Revenue Account. There continues to be significant demand for Council housing with over 1400 households on the active register.

## Council Size

| Topic                          |  |  |
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| <p><b>Governance Model</b></p> | <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> | <p><b>Strategic Leadership</b></p> <p>The Council operates a Leader and Executive Model. The Leader is elected at the annual meeting of the Council after the four yearly Council elections for a four-year term. The Leader in turn appoints his Portfolio Members, which currently cover the following portfolios:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Corporate and Commercial Services</li> <li>➤ Housing &amp; Property Services</li> <li>➤ Neighbourhood Operations</li> <li>➤ Climate &amp; Ecological Emergency</li> <li>➤ Place</li> <li>➤ People &amp; Transformation</li> </ul> <p>The Executive (Cabinet) holds public meetings in accordance with the published Committee timetable for the effective discharge of its functions, on dates and times agreed by the Cabinet and meets every month except during August.</p> <p>Cabinet Members play a key role in the development of strategic and major operational strategies and policies. They make decisions collectively at Cabinet and individually through their Portfolios, provide political leadership and implement policy through senior officers. Individual members are responsible for and play an active role in the development and clearance of all published Cabinet and delegated authority reports, which are in their name. Members hold regular scheduled briefings with Strategic Directors, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service, ahead of all Cabinet meetings.</p> <p>The Leader of the Council estimates that he spends approximately 4-5 days per week on his council duties, although this will vary from week to week. Members of the Cabinet estimate they spend between 3-5 days a week on their duties, which includes both their executive and elected member functions.</p> <p>In addition to formal and informal meetings of the Cabinet, portfolio holders meet regularly with officers to provide strategic guidance and receive briefings.</p> |

### **Accountability (scrutiny, regulatory and partnerships)**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees review and scrutinise all key decisions before they go to Cabinet for decision. Scrutiny committees also have the power to call-in decisions for further scrutiny if decisions are not made in accordance with the Council's decision-making principles.

Cabinet members are not permitted to be on scrutiny meetings (scrutiny meet on average 9 times per year) and 42 scrutiny members (14 on each committee) are required to serve these meetings, plus substitutions if required. The current Cabinet is 6 members plus the Leader of the Council. Therefore 49 members are required to serve the Executive decision process including scrutiny alone.

In addition to the Executive decision making framework the Council has the following regulatory committees:

- Development Management (14 members) – meets 15 times a year
- Licensing (12 members) – meets monthly if required.
- Appeals and Reviews Committee (8 members) (ad-hoc as required)
- Audit Committee (6 member) meets six times a year
- Standards Committee (5 members) meets 4 times a year

Dacorum also has the following committees/steering groups noted below:

- Member Development Steering Group (6 members) meets 4 times a year
- Joint Negotiating Committee (4 members) meets 5 times a year if required
- Electoral Review Committee (6 members) ad-hoc as required
- Health and Well-being Committee (12 members) meets four times a year.

In total therefore 73 seats are required to be filled for the regulatory and other committees/working groups, although the frequency of these meetings varies in accordance with the committee timetable and whether there is relevant business to be considered.

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|  |          | <p>In summary, there are a total of 115 committee seats to be filled by 51 councillors to fill the scrutiny, regulatory and other committee seats (excluding Cabinet seats and full Council) at a ratio of 2.25 seats per member.</p> <p>The above ratio enables each councillor to take part in a variety of the Council's decision-making and regulatory committees, which has proven to be effective and enabled sound decision-making. Reducing the numbers of councillors would mean this ratio would move up which would be problematic in terms of attendance as many councillors have full-time jobs and other commitments, and workloads need to remain proportionate to ensure that the Council can continue to attract councillors from all demographics.</p> <p>Significantly Increasing the number of councillors would dilute the influence of individual councillors and prevent councillors from gaining a holistic view of the Council's functions and would not be desirable; however, it is the view of Council that a small increase of two councillors would provide greater resilience and an enhanced ability for councillors to substitute for one another at meetings if required.</p> <p>In addition to formal Council business a number of councillors are appointed as Council representatives on outside bodies. These organisations include local charities, community groups and regional and national bodies. In total there are 57 outside appointments made. Meeting frequencies vary but are generally no more than quarterly.</p> <p>It can be challenging for political Group Leaders to find enough councillors to provide representation on all of these outside bodies and therefore a small increase in councillors would assist with the distribution of roles.</p> |
|  | Analysis | <p>The current Leader and Executive governance model has operated effectively since its introduction and there are no plans for it to change in the foreseeable future. The model provides a framework for agile and efficient decision-making with scrutiny and policy development support provided by the three statutory Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and the Audit Committee.</p> <p>The current number of councillors (51) has adequately served the current governance structure, but it is the view of Council that a further two councillors would provide some extra assurance that committee seats can</p>   |

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|                          |  | <p>continue to be filled and provide resilience for the Council going forward.</p> <p>Alternative numbers have been considered but for the reasons set out above, it is the view of Council that 53 members provides the right balance and will enable councillors to continue to take part in various scrutiny and decision-making committees, ensure that the public are appropriately represented from councillors with relevant experience and local constituency knowledge, but also provide resilience if there are any absences.</p>  |
| <p><b>Portfolios</b></p> | <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> | <p>Dacorum currently has six portfolios:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Corporate and Commercial Services</li> <li>➤ Housing &amp; Property Services</li> <li>➤ Neighbourhood Operations</li> <li>➤ Climate &amp; Ecological Emergency</li> <li>➤ Place</li> <li>➤ People &amp; Transformation</li> </ul> <p>This was increased to 6 following the May 2023 elections by the addition of a Portfolio Holder for Climate and Ecological Emergency.</p> <p>Portfolio Holders are responsible for the functions and services, which fall within their remit as agreed by the Leader of the Council. The services which fall under each Portfolio are set out in Part 3 of the Constitution, published on our website, and change from time to time to reflect Council priorities.</p> <p>Portfolio Holders agree the strategic direction for the services within their portfolio, oversee performance and agree any strategy, policy, project, or initiative before it goes to Cabinet for final approval. Portfolio Holders also exercise decision making directly for major operational issues affecting their portfolios.</p> <p>In 2022/23 there were 42 Portfolio Holder decisions across all Portfolios.</p> <p>The role of Portfolio Holder is not a full time position but Members estimate that they spend between 3-5 days per week carrying out their responsibilities, which varies from week to week depending on meeting requirements and other commitments. This time estimate includes general members' responsibilities.</p> |

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|                                   | Analysis                        | The number of portfolios has remained broadly constant over the last 20 years and for the last two electoral terms has involved either 5 or 6 Portfolios. The functions and services that portfolios cover is a decision of the Leader of the Council and are amended from time to time, but there are no significant changes proposed that are likely to impact the number of Portfolio Holders in the short to medium term.   |
| <b>Delegated Responsibilities</b> | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | The Council has a scheme of delegation in place as set out in Schedule 2, Part 3 of the Constitution to ensure the operational efficiency of the Council. Cabinet delegate operational decisions to officers but the most strategic and significant decisions are reserved for members.   |
|                                   | Analysis                        | Portfolio Holder decisions require appropriately skilled and experienced members to ensure that decisions are made fairly and proportionately. Therefore it is essential to have a significant pool of members to be able to call upon from the party forming the administration. This has been achievable with the current 51 member base but could be a challenge if this number was reduced, and the pool of available candidates will be improved with the proposed change to 53 councillors. |

## Accountability

| Topic                           |  |
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| <b>Internal Scrutiny</b>        |  |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <p>Dacorum has 3 main Overview and Scrutiny Committees which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Finance and Resources (14 members)</li> <li>➤ Housing and Community (14 members)</li> <li>➤ Strategic Planning and Environment (14 members)</li> </ul> <p>The number of members on each committee has remained constant over recent years. 14 members enables good representation from the administration but more importantly from opposition members as each committee has to be politically balanced. A membership of 14 enables scrutiny to benefit from the knowledge &amp; experience of councillors representing the borough as a whole.</p> <p>Each committee is responsible for different functions of the Council as set out in Part 2 of the Constitution and the portfolios are broadly aligned to Council departments.</p> |

The OSC vision is – ‘Scrutiny making a difference: member-led and independent, Overview & Scrutiny Committees promote service improvements, influence policy development and hold the Executive to account for the benefit of the whole community of Dacorum’

OSC therefore has a broad vision and purpose and is used to scrutinise and assist with strategy, project and policy development, and review service performance and the outputs from approved policies, strategies and projects.

The scrutiny committees each meet 9 times a year.

The work programme is developed in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of each committee and approved by committee at each meeting.

The committees have the power to call-in decisions of the Executive for further review, although this power is rarely required due to the significant level of pre-decision scrutiny which takes place.

In addition to ordinary meetings, the Committees can agree to establish task and finish groups to review and develop important policies, projects or initiatives. There are currently two tasks and finish groups set up to consider the Council’s Housing Maintenance Contract and Local Plan development.

The Council is currently undertaking a review of its scrutiny function which is being facilitated by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). The draft report highlighted the positive engagement of members and supported the overall committee structure and highlighted areas for potential review and improvement. At the point of this submission the recommendations of the review are currently being considered by officers and members, but it is not expected that any of the recommendations will result in significant structural change which will impact on the councillor resource required to serve the committees.

The Council’s scrutiny function is further enhanced by its Audit Committee, which comprises six members for each meeting.

The work programme of the Committee is developed at the start of the municipal year, and reviewed quarterly. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman play an active role in developing the work programme also. There are normally between six meetings annually.

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|                           |                                 | <p>The Audit Committee has the specific role of monitoring the budget, approving the Council's Statement of Accounts, considers matters of risk management, and any internal audits which have been carried out. The committee also has oversight of the Council's treasury management functions.</p>  |
|                           | Analysis                        | <p>The Council has a positive and effective scrutiny function with good engagement from members. The function does require a significant numbers of members to fill the committee seats (42) across the three committees plus six on Audit but they provide a vital function in an Executive form of governance to hold the Executive to account. The Council are not anticipating any significant structural change to this function going forward although the recommendations of the recent scrutiny review are currently being considered.</p>   |
| <b>Statutory Function</b> |                                 |  |
| <b>Some</b>               | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <p>The Development Management Committee (DMC) is the committee responsible for determining planning applications across the borough. It consists of 14 members and substitutes can be called from the wider member pool if required as long as they have received prior training. The scheme of delegation in Part 3 of the Constitution delegates decisions to officers, but has a number of exclusions from delegation including; major applications, those with significant public interest, those which are called-in by ward members and where there is a contrary view to the officers recommendation from a town or parish council – all of these exclusions are reserved for committee decision.</p> |
|                           | Analysis                        | <p>In 2022/23 95% of the applications received were determined by officers, but the exclusions from delegation mean that DMC still has a significant workload and in the last two financial years have determined circa 90 applications each year.</p> <p>DMC meets on average every 3 weeks (15 times a year) and these meetings can be demanding for members, lasting between 2- 4 hours. Applications can be complex and require significant preparation time to read the application reports before the meeting in order to prepare.</p> <p>Some applications also necessitate members making a site visit to consider the site and surroundings prior to the meeting.</p>                               |

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|                  |                                 | <p>DMC considers applications from across the borough and therefore it is important that there is geographical representation from the boroughs three main towns and the rural parts of the borough. The current 14 members provides an adequate pool of members to support the committee but less than 14 would not provide sufficient members to adequately serve the committee.</p>   |
| <b>Licensing</b> | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <p>The Licensing and Health and Safety Enforcement Committee is responsible for fulfilling the role of the statutory Licensing Authority under the Licensing Act and Gambling Act as well as other regimes such as Hackney Carriage licensing. It is also responsible for certain functions under health and safety law. The main committee delegates most decisions to officers unless objections to applications are received in which case they are referred to one of two sub-committees for decision.</p> <p>The two sub-committees are the Licensing Health and Safety Enforcement Sub-Committee (6 members) and a Licensing of Alcohol and Gambling Sub-Committee (3 Members), which are drawn from the main committee. The sub-committees have delegated responsibilities as set out in Part 3 of the Constitution.</p> <p>Applications reported to the main committee and sub-committees can be complex and will generally involve public representation and can last anywhere between 1-3 hours. As with DMC, the committee meetings require significant preparation time to read and consider reports before the meeting.</p> <p>The Licensing committee is scheduled for meeting monthly but is cancelled if there is no business.</p> <p>In 2022/23 three full Licensing Committees took place, five Licensing Health and Safety Sub-Committee and one Licensing of Alcohol and Gambling Sub-committee.</p> |
|                  | <i>Analysis</i>                 | <p>The current structure of the Licensing Committee works efficiently and provides an adequate pool of members.</p> <p>Members are required to be trained and therefore members are allocated specifically to the committee, although substitutes can be called from the wider membership if required.</p> <p>The current split of functions between the main committee and sub-committees works efficiently and reduces the burden on the full committee.</p>   |

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|                                |                                 | There are no plans to change the composition of the committee in the foreseeable future.   |
| <b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b> | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <p>The Council has the following other regulatory Committees:</p> <p>Appeals and Reviews Committee (8 members) (ad-hoc as required). The terms of reference include the determination of appeals against employee dismissals, determinations on Tree Preservation Orders, hearings on Business Rate Discretionary Rate Relief where certain financial limits are exceeded. In 2222/23 this meeting met 4 times.</p> <p>Standards Committee (5 members) meets 4 times a year if required - The terms of reference include the determination of complaints of councillor conduct that have been referred and the consideration of related codes of conduct. In 2022/23 this committee met twice, although neither meeting was required to consider a formal councillor complaint. Traditionally, the number of complaints against councillors in Dacorum is low with most complaints being dealt with at the assessment stage of the complaints process, which is led by the Monitoring Officer</p> <p>Joint Negotiating Committee (4 members) meets 5 times a year if required. This committee is used to enable the negotiation and resolution of trade relation matters with the council's trade unions. In 2022/23 JNC was not required to meet.</p> <p>The Electoral Review Committee (6 members) is an ad-hoc committee and meets as required to consider electoral matters such as boundary reviews, polling place reviews and electoral reviews. In 2022/23 the committee was only required to meet once but the work of the committee in 2023/24 will increase as it will play an important part in this Electoral Review.</p> <p>Health and Well-being Committee (12 members) meets four times a year. The terms of reference for this committee are to review internal and external providers of health services within Dacorum. The remit of the committee was reviewed in 2023 to give it a greater focus to review and develop services provided by the Council rather than just the external focus it had previously.</p> <p>There is limited delegation from the above committees to officers as most matters are considered directly by committee members. This makes member training and pre-meeting briefings particularly important.</p> |
|                                | <i>Analysis</i>                 | The above committees all play a vital role to ensure that the Council's functions and services are effectively discharged. The workload for each committee varies and fluctuates depending on the workplans and matters arising in-year, but the   |

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|  |  | <p>structure allows meeting dates to be flexible as required. There are no plans to change the structure of these meetings in the short-medium term although the remit of each committee is reviewed from time to time.</p>   |
| <b>External Partnerships</b>           |  |   |
| <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> | <p>A number of councillors are appointed as Council representatives on outside bodies. These organisations include local charities, community groups and regional and national bodies such as the Local Government Association. In total there are 57 outside appointments made. Meeting frequencies vary but are generally no more than quarterly.</p> <p>These groups are generally not decision-making forums in the sense that they have no decision-making authority to bind the Council and any decision relating to the Council's affairs or business would need to go through internal decision-making processes if an official Dacorum vote on a matter was required.</p> <p>The Council is a party to various inter-authority partnerships or companies, but generally officers are appointed to formal decision making roles rather than councillors. There are examples where councillors are on Joint Committees such as the West Herts Crematorium Joint Committee, where appointed councillors do have voting rights, but those voting rights would only be exercised where decisions have been through the appropriate decision making process within the Council.</p> <p>There has in recent years been an increase in the level of partnership working on the growth and infrastructure agenda with the nine other districts and boroughs in Hertfordshire and the County Council, together with other external organisations. Senior Members including the Leader are represented and vote accordingly. These include the Herts Growth Board, Herts Innovation Quarter (Enterprise Zone, mainly based in Hemel Hempstead), South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan, the Hemel Garden Communities Board and Hemel Place Board.</p> <p>Workload is generally limited to attendance at meetings with some preparation time to read agenda papers in advance if any are produced.</p> |   |
|  | <p>Analysis</p>  | <p>Membership of outside bodies is an important part of councillors' representative roles in order to represent the Council in the wider community. It enables councillors to hear first-hand the issues affecting their constituents and enables councillors to develop strategy and policy, which impact their local areas. The list of outside bodies was reviewed following the local elections in May 2023 and some organisations were removed from the list who no longer wanted representation. The list remains under review, but it is not expected to</p> |

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|  | significantly change in the near future and therefore demand on councillors is likely to remain constant. However, it has been problematic for Group Leaders to allocate councillors to all outside bodies and the addition of two further councillors would assist this process. |
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**Community Leadership**

| Topic                       |                                 | Description  |
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| <b>Community Leadership</b> | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <p>Councillors engage with their communities to understand the issues that are important to them. This is done in different ways by different councillors. Some councillors are very active in their communities with representation roles on community groups and local charities. Other councillors are much more active and use social media to a greater extent to understand local issues.</p> <p>Many councillors have dual representation roles either at County Council level or Town and Parish Council level and this enables councillors to gain a holistic view of issues at all levels of local government, but it also puts additional demand on their time.</p> <p>Many councillors use social media or email groups to communicate and to get wider messaging out, and reach parts of the community on a group basis, which would have been problematic at the time of the last review. Social media also enables councillors to gain a greater understanding of issues affecting the local area. Some councillors have set up Facebook groups, which have enabled direct interaction with residents in order to develop solutions to local issues.</p> <p>Ward surgeries or group meetings are much less frequent than they were in 2006 and are infrequently used although they can still be arranged if there are issues of particular concern to the locality.</p> <p>The Council does not have geographical area committees and all committees and decision-making forums cover the whole borough. Area representation comes from committee membership, which provides cross borough input.</p> <p>At Dacorum all councillors have at least two seats on different committees and this allows councillors to take that community knowledge and use it to develop strategy, policies and projects that will benefit the communities they represent and enable sound decision making.</p> |

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|          | Analysis                        | <p>Modern forms of communication have made the representation role of councillors much more effective. They are able to gain a greater insight into local issues, assist individuals and use this knowledge to develop council policy that can make a difference to their wards. Changing the number of councillors is unlikely to significantly change the effectiveness of community leadership as it is now more efficient via modern methods of communication to reach out and support individuals and groups; however, the proposed addition of two councillors will reduce the councillor/electorate ratio and will assist the community leadership role.</p>  |
| Casework | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <p>A large number of queries, which would have been previously directed to councillors are now solved through direct contact with the Council, which is done by phone, email or social media.</p> <p>Therefore contact with councillors now often involves more complex matters such as planning or public policy issues where advice is being sought, or where dissatisfaction is being expressed resulting from the action or a decision of the Council.</p> <p>Initial contact with councillors is often made through email, or phone and issues are often picked up through community groups on social media. This has changed significantly since the last review in 2006 where most enquiries would have come by letter or phone and social media was in its infancy. Most communication with residents is now undertaken by email and phone, which has made communication a lot easier.</p> <p>Issues raised by residents can often be resolved by referral to relevant officers and occasionally more direct intervention is required to coordinate officer or members in order to seek an appropriate resolution.</p> <p>Members generally believe that casework is proportionate to the borough councillor role and manageable and can be dealt with on average with 1-2 days per week, but when this is combined with the required committee membership (pre-meeting preparation and attendance), and attendance at meetings of outside bodies, this does increase to 2-3 days per week although this does vary from councillor to councillor.</p> <p>Councillors do not feel that increasing or decreasing the numbers will significantly change this workload although the proposed addition of two councillors will enable additional capacity, particularly in areas where significant development growth is planned.</p> |

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|  | Analysis | The level of casework remains manageable and enables councillors to represent their constituents in an effective manner, but the addition of two extra councillors will enable improved representation taking account of the planned population growth to 2030 and beyond. |
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## Summary

Councillors continue to work hard to represent and support their communities and perform their role within the Council's governance framework.

The role requires significant time investment to meet the demands of constituents, work with fellow councillors and officers to develop strategy, policies and projects, which can make a real difference to communities.

Any reduction in the number of councillors would require higher attendance across all meetings and it is the view of Council that this would put a disproportionate burden on councillors when considered with the other representation roles many of them carry out.

It is essential that the Council continue to ensure that the role of a councillor is attractive and manageable and this means that it needs to work for those in full and part-time employment and those with caring responsibilities. The workload needs to remain proportionate to ensure that councillors can continue to perform their community leadership and representative roles in an effective manner.

The Council continues to find itself in a challenging environment as the recovery from Covid -19 and high inflation continues, which will mean that the demands on the Council and councillors will continue to increase. However, with the advent of new working practices, the Council has become a much more efficient organisation since the last review in 2006 and therefore many local issues can be resolved by officers before they require input from councillors.

The Council's overall governance structure has remained relatively unchanged since the last review and experience has shown that the current 51 members has efficiently served that structure. However, the workload on councillors to serve this structure is significant and it is the view of Council that an additional two councillors will provide greater resilience to the Council's governance framework.

Growth is planned for the borough which will increase the population by 2030 and beyond and it is the view of Council that this should be reflected in a small increase in councillor numbers to 53 to ensure that the councillor to constituent ratio remains proportionate.