

# Council Size Submission: Harlow

Harlow District Council

## [Contents](#)

|  |    |
|--|----|
| How to Make a Submission .....           | 2  |
| About You .....                          | 2  |
| The Context for your proposal .....      | 3  |
| Local Authority Profile .....            | 5  |
| The Evolution of Harlow.....             | 6  |
| Neighbourhood design.....                | 6  |
| Population Profile.....                  | 7  |
| Council Size.....                        | 8  |
| Strategic Leadership.....                | 8  |
| Accountability.....                      | 12 |
| Community Leadership.....                | 19 |
| Other Issues .....                       | 24 |
| Summary .....                            | 24 |
| Council view on Election by thirds ..... | 24 |
| Options considered.....                  | 24 |
| Reduction in members .....               | 24 |
| No change .....                          | 25 |
| Limited Growth.....                      | 25 |

## How to Make a Submission

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

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

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

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

## About You

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

This is a submission made by Harlow District Council and was approved at a full meeting of the Council on 24 February 2022. The proposal received unanimous support from all Councillors present at the meeting.

Following the Council's formal request for the review, the Council established an Electoral Review Working Group in October 2021, chaired by Councillor Simon Carter, with the following Terms of Reference:

- (a) To oversee and ensure full Member involvement in and support to officers in progressing the review of Council size and the ward boundaries in Harlow by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE);
- (b) To formulate draft recommendations to the Local Government Boundary Commission for consideration by the Council relating to:

- (i) the total number of Members of the Council
  - (ii) the number and boundaries of electoral wards for the purposes of the election of Councillors;
  - (iii) the number of Councillors to be returned by any electoral division;  
and
  - (iv) the name of any electoral area.
- (c) To make recommendation to the Council on its future electoral cycle if considered appropriate

The Working Group comprised of five Members and was politically proportionate with representation from both political groups on the Council.

### The Context for your proposal

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

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

### **Last Changes to Internal Governance Arrangements**

The last review by the boundary commission was undertaken at a time when the authority was operating a Committee system as a 'fourth choice' authority. At that time, in addition to the full Council, it operated six central committees (Strategic Policy and Equalities, Resources Co-ordination, Housing, Personnel, Audit Quality and Best Value and Commercial Development and Enterprise). In addition, there were seven Area Committees whose remit was to debate and examine all issues directly or indirectly affecting the community. The last review reduced the number of members from 42 to 33.

Since that time the Council changed to a new Cabinet operating model in 2010 and although taking on Licensing functions in the early 2000's, no longer has six programme committees or any Area Committees. The Governance structure is

discussed further below in the Strategic Leadership section. Essentially the Council operates a Cabinet of eight (current) members and the following Committees: Scrutiny Committee, Development Management Committee, Licensing Committee and Audit and Standards Committee.

The Council's Constitution Working Group are currently undertaking a review of its governance arrangements but, having done this in 2010, this review is essentially codifying its rules in light of operational experience rather than a quantum shift to a more onerous form of governance. This review will be completed by March 2022 subject to Council approval. The Cabinet model has operated successfully with some good examples of scrutiny/cabinet working in recent months.

The Council has ambition to significantly regenerate the town and has recently taken steps to increase capacity within its senior managers to undertake greater levels of multidisciplinary projects. In turn Cabinet portfolio responsibilities have recently been recast to match the aspirations of the Council's administration.

No governance issues have been raised by recent inspections or similar.

### **Local and National Policy Trends**

The Council has recently worked on a new Corporate Strategy, which was adopted by the Council in December 2021. The aspiration of the Council is that this will enable the setting of a balanced budget again in 22/23 and in future years provide certainty on which the Council can financially plan through its Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The ambitions within the Corporate Strategy are to be achieved through four key strategic themes. These are:

1. Economic Growth;
2. Social Cohesion;
3. Safeguarding the Environment
4. An Efficient Council

Pressure on Local Authorities mean that the Council is always looking for ways of working with greater efficiency including but not limited to considering service sharing opportunities.

Work of this nature is brought forward in a collaborative way through the Cabinet and the current administration has appointed 'opposition shadow members' to assist in shaping policy.

As detailed above the Corporate Strategy places emphasis on economic growth part of which includes significant plans for the regeneration of Harlow. There has been a material increase in workload surrounding this specific strategic theme as will be evidenced throughout.

Furthermore, under the current and previous administration, the environment has, and continues to be, a corporate priority; in 2019, Full Council unanimously

declared a climate emergency resulting in an expansion of the work associated with this strategic theme.

### **Impact on the Council's Effectiveness**

Having looked at current arrangements, which remain fit for purpose, and having taken soundings from members both via survey and anecdotally, the Council's governance arrangements are seen as sound and can be supported by the current level of representation. The point has been made by both political parties that when the council is more balanced than currently (i.e. the number of councillors are closer) filling places on Committees and outside partnerships becomes more difficult particularly for the administration at that time. As shown below, some areas of the responsibilities (cabinet roles) do lead to a heavy workload for example Scrutiny has, in the last couple of years, (and particularly during the pandemic) had to make choices on the work it undertakes. A review of scrutiny processes during 2020 has helped to focus Cabinet, officer and scrutiny expectations and work closer together. The increase in Harlow Garden Town and Partnership working will also impact the Council as regeneration continues apace as is discussed further below.

### **Local Authority Profile**

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

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

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

### **Profile**

Harlow is located in the west of the County of Essex and is bordered by Epping Forest district to the south, west and east; and East Hertfordshire district (in the County of Hertfordshire) to the north. Harlow is 38km north of London and 50km south of Cambridge. It has good access to the M11 (with a further junction being constructed to the north east), and the West Anglia Mainline railway and

Stansted Airport is located 24km to the north-east. Harlow is the smallest local authority area in Essex, with a land area of 30.5sqkm.

### **The Evolution of Harlow**

Between 1946 and 1970, 21 New Towns were designated in the UK under the New Towns Act, primarily to rehouse communities displaced by bomb damage caused during the Second World War. The New Towns were influenced by Garden Cities, formulated by Sir Ebenezer Howard in the late 1800's to deliver settlements which combined the best of town and country and offered alternatives to the polluted, industrial towns of the Industrial Revolution.

In September 1946, the then Minister of Town and Country Planning, Lewis Silkin, invited Frederick Gibberd to work on a plan for a New Town in the Harlow area. The plan would also contribute to designating the site of the New Town. An inquiry into the designation was held in December 1946 and the Ministry enacted a Designation Order for Harlow New Town on 25 March 1947. The current tight administrative boundary of Harlow, and subsequent small size of the district, is a legacy of this designation. However, Harlow nowadays serves as an important sub-regional centre that meets employment, retailing, social and cultural needs of the surrounding area.

Sir Frederick Gibberd's draft master plan was given ministerial approval in 1949 and the Harlow Development Corporation was established to deliver Harlow New Town. The final version of the master plan was published in 1952.

The master plan was influenced by the area's distinctive landscape and environmental features, such as the River Stort in the north, the valley ridges and wooded areas in the south and other important ecological assets.

### **Neighbourhood design**

The New Town was built around a series of neighbourhoods, dissected by large areas of natural and semi-natural spaces, now known as Green Wedges, which are key physical features of Harlow that have shaped its subsequent growth by bringing the countryside into the town as a design principle. Additionally, the Town has a number of main artery roads which create the neighbourhood structure. The current ward boundaries, in many places, use these key features to denote democratic demarcation lines. Work in the latter stages of the review needs to take these key features into account.

The neighbourhoods, as set out in the master plan, are focussed around a shopping centre with easy access to social and educational facilities, connected by a series of distributor roads together with a network of cycleways and footpaths. These were separated by a network of landscape wedges, now nationally accepted as Green Wedges, which were designed to reflect the original landscape setting. These promote a keen sense of local identity and communities.

The Green Wedges continue to provide amenity space for residents, habitats for wildlife, transport corridors, locations for schools and sport and community

facilities. Two industrial sites, Templefields and Pinnacles, were located in the north and west of the district, relatively close to the railway line. The Town Park was provided to the north-east of the town centre and was designed around existing landscape features and a hamlet.

## **Population Profile**

Harlow's population is approximately 87,300<sup>1</sup> residents. The district first reached its original target population of around 80,000 people in the mid-1970s, but this was subsequently followed by a period of population decline. In 1995, Harlow's population fell to 73,600 people, which gave rise to a number of social and economic problems.

The district's population grew again in the late 1990s and 2000s through planned extensions to Harlow, in particular the Church Langley and Newhall neighbourhoods and is set to continue to grow in the period to 2028.

Harlow has a very high population density of 26.8 people per hectare, compared to 4.7 for Essex and 4.1 for England. This high density is compensated by easy access to services and facilities and the network of Green Wedges and open spaces across the district.

The population of Harlow, in comparison to the rest of Essex, is relatively young with 21% of its residents aged between 0 -15 years, and the percentage of older persons living in Harlow is lower than Essex and England averages. However, this is projected to increase from 13,500 in 2018 to 18,000 by 2033, which would result in a 33.3% increase in older persons living in Harlow.

The district has a higher than average number of lone parent households alongside higher overcrowding levels compared to the rest of Essex and England. However, deprivation levels are lower overall than the England average but still higher when compared to most other parts of Essex.

There are some specific variances within the district itself, with the east being less deprived than areas to the west and south. Furthermore, the district's health profile is higher than the England averages in some respects, such as smoking rates, alcohol related hospital admissions and obesity. Physical activity is also low and therefore overall health and wellbeing issues are seen across the town.

As is reported below, social related issues, particularly during the latter phases of the pandemic have led to increased workload for members, particularly during the last year<sup>2</sup>.

## **Population Growth**

The Council has recently had its Local Plan accepted and adopted. The population of Harlow has increased in the last ten years with a number of large-scale developments such as Newhall. Not only have these changes meant that

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<sup>1</sup> Nomis, Resident Population 2020

<sup>2</sup> See section on member support



some wards have become relatively large it has meant an increase in caseload as Councillors represent more people.

Some Councillors have experienced disproportionate increases in their workloads as a result.

### Council Size

The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role.

These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships), and Community Leadership**. Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

### Strategic Leadership

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

| Topic                   |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Governance Model</b> | <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i></li> <li>➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i></li> </ul> |
|                         | <p><i>Analysis</i></p> <p>The Council currently has 33 Councillors, elected by thirds. The Council’s political composition in 2021- 2022 is: Conservative 21, Labour 12. Prior to May 2021 the</p>  |

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|  | <p>Council had a Labour administration (since 2012).</p> <p>As a New Town Harlow does not have any town or parish councils. It is therefore responsible for any functions which may ordinarily be expected to be carried out by those authorities.</p> <p>The Council operates a Cabinet model with 8 Cabinet members, currently Conservative. The Cabinet meets (when averaged over the year) once every seven weeks.</p> <p>The Cabinet has a Policy Development Working Group which also meets cyclically and is cross party. This group have a forward work plan and a remit to have an early look at developing strategies and policies before they are subject to Cabinet decision. This role was evaluated recently as part of the review of our scrutiny rules and processes. (found <a href="#">here</a>)</p> <p>The authority operates one development management committee. Meetings of that committee generally have two to five items to consider meeting ten times a year. Significant delegation is in place for officers to deal with applications of a non-contentious nature and this has operated well for a number of years.</p> <p>The Council also operates the following committees: Licensing (five times per year) (and subcommittees dealing with applications and determinations) and a combined Audit and Standards Committee ;</p> <p>Strategic and operational policies are formulated by a number of routes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Via officers taking account of changes to external factors, this characteristically includes appropriate stakeholder consultation or statutory consultations where required, and discussion at the Cabinet Working Group</li></ol> |
|--|---|

|                          |  |   |
|--------------------------|--|---|
|                          |  | <p>2. Policy review driven by the new Corporate Strategy (emerging);</p> <p>3. Items raised as part of the annual Scrutiny work plan process.</p> <p>4. Matters formulated by the Portfolio Holders or Cabinet themselves</p> <p>Scrutiny does have the right to ask decision makers to attend and liaises at the beginning of each municipal year on where they could add value to proposed executive decision making.</p>   |
| <p><b>Portfolios</b></p> | <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i></li> </ul>   |
|                          | <p>Analysis</p>                        | <p>There are currently eight members of the cabinet. Their role extends to individual decision-making within delegations agreed by the Cabinet and leader between meetings and those items delegated by the Cabinet itself for an individual portfolio holder to decide in consultation with officers. Cabinet meets regularly as a group both formally, to decide items within their work plan, but also with chief officers to discuss strategic and operational issues. Most Cabinet members also have weekly review meetings with their Senior Officers.</p> <p>These roles are not full-time positions but are more onerous than other councillors due to their service responsibilities.</p> <p>The eight portfolios are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader</li> <li>• Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community and Business Resilience</li> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• Governance</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Regeneration</li> </ul> |

|                                   |                                 |  |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
|                                   |                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Growth</li> </ul> <p>Each has defined areas of responsibility (service related) and oversight of key strategic policies and areas</p> <p>Details of those Current delegation arrangements are set out <a href="#">here</a></p>  |
| <b>Delegated Responsibilities</b> | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i></li> </ul>   |
|                                   | Analysis                        | <p>Delegation to specific committees and officers is set out within part 3 of the Council's Constitution.</p> <p>Portfolio holders also have delegated authority from the Leader for individual decision making and may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take urgent decisions that cannot reasonably be deferred until the next meeting of the Cabinet on any matter within the powers delegated to Cabinet and their Portfolio, after written (including e-mail) consultation with the Leader (or Deputy if they are not available).</li> <li>• Take any decision that may be necessary to implement a decision of the Cabinet.</li> <li>• Agree the grant of licences for the use of land within their Portfolio.</li> <li>• Agree minor or inconsequential amendments to any Policy, Plan or Strategy within their Portfolio.</li> <li>• Take decisions relating to procurement and contractual matters as set out in the Financial Regulations and Procurement Policy and Standing Orders relating to contracts.</li> <li>• Where appropriate, and working with the relevant officers, respond to national consultation specific to their Portfolio.</li> <li>• Allocate specific grants relevant to their Portfolio.</li> </ul> |

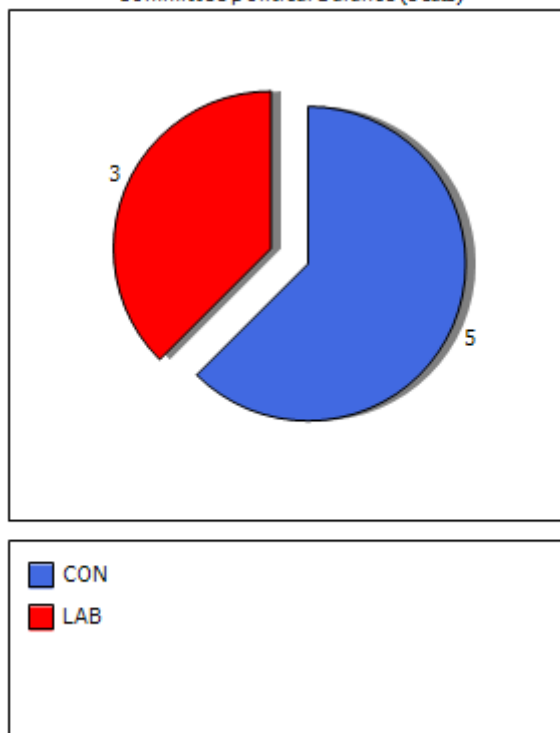
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|  |  | Collective decision making will take place at Cabinet (eight members) and in line with most Councils, major decisions would come to council should the constitution require it. |
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## Accountability

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

| Topic                           |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 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"> <li>➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i></li> </ul> |
| Analysis                        | <p>The council has one Scrutiny committee which meets four times a year and has a work plan of their own devising.</p> <p>The Scrutiny committee has eight members and is currently chaired by a member of the opposition group.</p> <p>The committee is politically balanced:</p>  |

Committee political balance (seats)



Scrutiny Committee seeks the view of the cabinet at the beginning of each year on likely topics for their work programme. The scale and number of projects undertaken in the last three years has taken account of members/officers' ability to deliver a programme within available resources and prioritises its work plan accordingly. This has meant commissioning external work and help from consultants and the need to prioritise the programme and extend the timetable.

In the last year work plan items relating to the council's housing development programme and facilities for adults with learning disabilities have been considered by the Scrutiny committee. Items this year have included scrutiny of the Police, a review of local electoral turnout and domestic abuse and harassment in Harlow.

Work plan topics are often dealt with by way of a small working party of scrutiny and backbench members who report back to the main committee once their review is complete.

Recommendations on the review are made to Cabinet and in the immediate past these have been accepted by the Cabinet.

|                                 |   |                                 |  |          |   |
|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--|----------|---|
|                                 | <p>The time commitment for Councillors on the Scrutiny Committee is not just limited to the Committee meetings themselves. Councillors are frequently involved in both working parties and steering groups associated with such reviews. For example, the Committee has a steering group for its review on domestic violence and sexual harassment. These create an additional workload commitment for Councillors.</p> <p>In addition to the Scrutiny committee, the authority now operates a Cabinet Policy Working Group, reporting directly to Cabinet on matters of upcoming policy. This is also cross party. The Working Group has a similar workload to the Scrutiny Committee and has a number of subgroups related to work it is carrying out.</p>  |                                 |  |          |   |
| <b>Statutory Function</b>       | <p>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?</p>   |                                 |  |          |   |
| <b>Planning</b>                 | <table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="355 1048 539 1489"><i>Key lines of explanation</i></td> <td data-bbox="539 1048 1287 1489"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="355 1489 539 1937">Analysis</td> <td data-bbox="539 1489 1287 1937"> <p>The Council has a single council-wide committee and has a scheme of delegation for planning functions with two to five applications going to each committee. This Scheme has not changed since 2012 and there is no current demand to review it. There has been no significant change in committee arrangements, and no further change is anticipated. Shown below is a breakdown of the planning applications the authority received in the last three years and the number ultimately determined by Committee.</p> </td> </tr> </table> | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> </ul> | Analysis | <p>The Council has a single council-wide committee and has a scheme of delegation for planning functions with two to five applications going to each committee. This Scheme has not changed since 2012 and there is no current demand to review it. There has been no significant change in committee arrangements, and no further change is anticipated. Shown below is a breakdown of the planning applications the authority received in the last three years and the number ultimately determined by Committee.</p> |
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| Year             | No of Apps Received | No of Apps reported to Committee |
|------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2019             | 517                 | 23 (4.4%)                        |
| 2020             | 620                 | 38 (6.1%)                        |
| 2021 (part year) | 647+                | 35+ (5.4%)                       |

As can be seen, although the percentage reaching members is fairly static, with the increase in applications over time, the number coming to committee is increasing.

The Council is a relatively small authority covering a densely populated area. Given this and the number of applications considered at Councillor level a single committee is the still the most appropriate mechanism.

There is no legal restriction on executive members considering planning applications. It is rare that more than one would be on the committee at any one time and time commitments make more being on it unlikely. Should the administration majority decrease there would be greater difficulty in separating the two functions. This is true for other committees, and evidences that a decision to have a smaller Council than currently would lead to problems filling seats on the committee without significantly increasing core member workload.

Planning has a considerable time commitment due to the relatively high number of meetings. The following time commitments are estimates and are informed following analysis of Councillor survey returns.

Time Commitment: That is an average of 10 meetings per year at 120 minutes each, including training and briefings = 1,200 minutes. If we assume that there is a similar time period to read papers = 1,200 minutes.

Dealing with correspondence 60 minutes per meeting = 600

Total= 3,000 minutes = 50 hours per year



|                                |                          |   |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
|                                |                          | The complexity of applications is changing resulting in an increase in the number of major applications, leading to a disproportionate time commitment. In particular there are a wide range of new developments in the town centre, along with developments associated with HGGT (mentioned elsewhere in the submission).  |
| <b>Licensing</b>               | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i></li> </ul>   |
|                                | Analysis                 | <p>The number of applications the Council received for licences dropped massively during the pandemic. There was little incentive to apply for licences which couldn't be used. Previous year's show a steady stream of committee work. Pre-pandemic there were 8 meetings on average a year and are a mixture of meetings. Some meetings are scheduled, but ad-hoc meetings are arranged when needed for licensing applications</p> <p>8 meetings per year at 90 minutes each = 720 minutes<br/> Same time to read papers = 720 minutes<br/> Dealing with correspondence 30 minutes per meeting = 240<br/> Total = 1,680 = 28 hours</p> <p>Members are drawn from the Licensing Committee and a rota is set up for scheduled meetings. For ad-hoc meetings availability is determined and members are then allocated to the meeting</p> <p>Members are put on a rota to ensure a fair distribution of meetings per year.</p> |
| <b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b> | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i></li> </ul>   |
|                                | Analysis                 | The Council has relatively small committees which spread out workload across all the Council's committees. The regulatory functions only deal   |

|                                 |   |   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
|                                 |   | <p>with applications that are contentious i.e. where objections have been received.</p> <p>The Licensing Committee has 10 members (the minimum under legislation). The Licensing Sub Committee and Regulatory Sub Committee have the same membership. The Development Management Committee has 8 members</p> <p>The delegations to Officers are already fairly extensive and only a limited number of applications come before members. Greater delegation is unlikely.</p> <p>The Audit and Standards Committee carries out regulatory functions both on the Council's accounts and its internal governance mechanisms. It is scheduled to meet four times a year.</p> <p>4 meetings per year at 90 mins each = 360 minutes<br/> Two hours to read papers for each meeting = 480 minutes<br/> Follow up Internal Audit Inspections<br/> Dealing with correspondence 30 minutes per meeting = 120<br/> Training 30 minutes per meeting = 120 minutes<br/> Total time = 1080 minutes = 18 hours per year</p> |
| <b>External Partnerships</b>    | <p>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.</p>  |   |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i></li> </ul> |   |
| Analysis                        | <p>The Council appoints to a number of bodies, some of which make decisions. These will be set out in an agreed scheme of delegation. The Council has its own Local Authority Trading Company (LATC), HTS, which with it has a close relationship. The</p>  |   |

Council has established a Shareholder Sub Committee to monitor HTS, with certain decisions requiring Cabinet approval. Members of the Council also sit on the Boards of the various HTS Companies but not Cabinet members.

The time commitments are estimates and will be more informed following analysis of Councillor survey returns.

Like other councils, the Council appoints to outside bodies. The workload for these will be skewed towards portfolio holders.

Where there are bodies that commitments can be made on, it is normally executive members who are appointed to them, although typically final decisions will be made by Cabinet/Full Council.

The exception to this is councillors appointed as directors of HTS and its subsidiaries. These cannot be portfolio holders to avoid a conflict of interest. Some decisions will be made on behalf of the council but these functions are set out in a scheme of delegation

Almost all this work would be undertaken by portfolio holders, except for the HTS directorships. The workload is difficult to estimate, but HTS directors are remunerated on a level equal to portfolio holders and it is clear that there is a fairly significant time commitment to fulfil these directorships. There are 8 HTS board meetings per year that the directors attend with six sub committees who meet regularly.

The Council appoints to a number (approximately 30) of outside bodies like other councils. Workload is difficult to calculate but members are currently managing their time effectively although it can be unpredictable.

In addition, the Council is also committed to the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) project. This is a significant project working together with neighbouring authorities. This requires a very large time commitment for Portfolio Holders, as the governance arrangements are extensive.

HGGT also creates workload for members of the Development Management Committee due to

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|  | <p>related planning applications. The Council is already having to start dealing with these, notably with applications for crossings over the River Stort. Applications like these are highly complex and require a far greater time commitment than would normally be expected.</p> <p>Part of the HGGT project requires a Strategic Transport Corridor within Harlow. This will create a substantial workload, particularly for the relevant Portfolio Holders.</p> <p>The Council has set out a number of bodies such as the Harlow Growth Board which work with other areas of the community. Councillors have indicated through the Electoral Review Working Group that these have added further workload which did not exist at the time of the previous review.</p> <p>Harlow sits on the Innovation Corridor (between Cambridge to London) and the Council appoints a representative to this body. The work from this partnership generates extra work.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Council has created a Covid Recovery Working Group, which is cross-party. It is clear that short, medium- and longer-term recovery from Covid is complex. This has resulted in, and will continue to create ongoing workload.</p> <p>The Council also operates a Highways Panel, jointly with Essex County Council. The Panel has the power to recommend to the County Council that traffic schemes are implemented. There are four Harlow Council Councillors on the Panel (although the four County Councillors are also district Councillors). The Panel meets four times a year with meetings lasting around an hour not including prep time and lobbying for schemes</p> |
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**Community Leadership**

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

Commission also wants to see a consideration of **how the use of technology and social media by the council as a whole, and by councillors individually, will affect casework, community engagement and local democratic representation. Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

| Topic                |                          | Description   |
|----------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Community Leadership | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i></li> </ul> |
|                      | Analysis                 | <p>In preparation for this submission, a member survey was undertaken to find out, amongst other matters, the ways in which Councillors interacted with the public. The top ways are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email</li> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Surgeries/Face to face</li> <li>• Door to door</li> <li>• Attendance at external meetings as a representative</li> <li>• Engaging with constituents e.g. home visits</li> <li>• Written letters</li> <li>• Dealing with constituents' enquiries / casework</li> </ul>   |

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|                        |  | <p>Certainly, members will have significantly changed the way they interact since the last review more than twenty years ago and the pandemic has also significantly changed interaction methods by necessity.</p> <p>Councillors are provided with Council technology and email addresses within which they are expected to manage their individual contact workloads.</p> <p>Some Councillors have resumed surgeries although the attendance rates are generally quite low. A few Councillors have started using Facebook Live to engage with residents.</p> <p>Councillors have experienced a general increase in the level of communication with residents due to social media. There is an expectation that Councillors will interact and respond to queries, which fall outside of the scope of traditional casework. These are often informal but as they are public, they require careful handling. It is expected that this trend will continue.</p> <p>The Council uses its Youth Council as a means of engaging with younger people, and has an active relationship with Harlow College. These both facilitate interaction with people under voting age. The Council has developed good relationships with a number of local organisations who represent ethnic minorities and Councillors can interact through these groups.</p> <p>The Council sets no requirement to attend committee meetings, although there would be an expectation that Councillors who are appointed to outside bodies attend such meetings. There are no parish councils within Harlow which as a result drives all local council matters to the district.</p> |
| <p><b>Casework</b></p> | <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></li> </ul>  |

|                   |                                 | <p>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></p>  |                   |                                 |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |      |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|--|-------------------|---------------------------------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|------|
|                   | <p>Analysis</p>                 | <p>The Council has a dedicated Councillor enquiry system which enables greater management of casework. This has a timeframe for responses from the Council to the Councillor. Councillor involvement is expected to be through this system in most instances.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="576 573 1249 1115"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year (Jan to Dec)</th> <th>No of Councillor Enquiries rcvd</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2015</td> <td>318</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>428</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017</td> <td>550</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>595</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>771</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>832</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>1255</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>In the year to 31 December 2020, 832 such enquiries were made by members. During the current year, to 31 December 2021, this had risen quite considerably to 1255. Covid has pushed residents to use other methods to contact Councillors and this has now become the new normal in reaching out rather than face to face. This is only a subset of interactions members would have experienced.</p> <p>Members are able to access advice and support through the Corporate and Democratic Services within the Governance and Corporate Services Directorate but do not have specific political support arrangements.</p> <p>Councillors are given an induction training programme, along with some ad-hoc training throughout the year, for example, on planning matters. The Council is developing a more comprehensive training programme for Councillors, and an annual survey is also carried out in order to assess Councillor's needs.</p> | Year (Jan to Dec) | No of Councillor Enquiries rcvd | 2015 | 318 | 2016 | 428 | 2017 | 550 | 2018 | 595 | 2019 | 771 | 2020 | 832 | 2021 | 1255 |
| Year (Jan to Dec) | No of Councillor Enquiries rcvd |  |                   |                                 |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |      |
| 2015              | 318                             |  |                   |                                 |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |      |
| 2016              | 428                             |  |                   |                                 |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |      |
| 2017              | 550                             |  |                   |                                 |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |      |
| 2018              | 595                             |  |                   |                                 |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |      |
| 2019              | 771                             |  |                   |                                 |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |      |
| 2020              | 832                             |  |                   |                                 |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |      |
| 2021              | 1255                            |  |                   |                                 |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |      |

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|  |  | <p>The pandemic has accelerated the switch towards digital communication with residents. Door to door visits have remained popular as they are often part of Councillors party political canvassing work. Most Councillors have indicated that the majority of their casework now comes via email. Social media has clearly had an impact on how Councillors interact with most Councillors having some form of social media presence. This has allowed for more immediate interaction with larger numbers of residents.</p> <p>The Council promotes online methods of engagement including through use of forms on its website, social media and its complaints procedure. Use of digital engagement methods was further promoted after the first lockdown.</p> <p>Councillors through the Electoral Working Group have noted not just the increase in workload, but the increasing complexity of casework caused by unique aspects of Harlow.</p> <p>Harlow has a much higher level of council tenants than average (particularly when compared with the rest of Essex and the Eastern Region). With the Council being responsible for maintenance and allocation of council properties Councillors are contacted more often than average to assist.</p> <p>Harlow also has a significant number of residential accommodations created through Permitted Development Rights. There is a large amount of churn of residents at these developments, including people who are placed in them by other authorities. These are often vulnerable people with complex cases that take a longer time to deal with. As with any area where there is a greater than average level of deprivation, other ancillary issues arise such as anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>Harlow experiences higher levels of deprivation than neighbouring authorities. This increased level of deprivation contributes both to an increased number of cases, but often to more time-consuming casework.</p> |
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## Other Issues

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

## Workload of Councillors

As part of the evidence base for this submission all Councillors were asked to complete a survey on their workload caused by their roles as a Councillor. This survey formed part of the work to establish the current needs, challenges and requirements facing elected members. In total 19 Councillors responded to the survey who were a mix of Cabinet and non-Cabinet Councillors.

Preparing for and attending meetings takes up a significant amount of Councillor time. Attending council meetings ranked sixth in the answers to question 10. The Council has comparatively few formal meetings, but particularly for Cabinet members, there are a large number of other meetings to attend.

There is a large variance in the amount of monthly case work, ranging from 1-5 cases up to 41-45 cases a month. The median is 11-15 cases. Generally, Councillors feel they are able to cope, however there are some who occasionally find the workload difficult. This is in part due to the quantity of workload, and similar points were raised later in the survey. There have been, however, significant increases in member reporting this year.

The survey revealed that there is a near even split between those who are spending the amount of time they were expecting to as a Councillor and those that are spending greater time. It is noted that whilst residents will contact Councillors directly, with annual elections Councillors can generate additional workload through canvassing. The number of Councillor Enquiries rises significantly in the run up to elections. See earlier diagram on figures

## Summary

### Council view on Election by thirds

The Council's established Working Group recommended to the Council in December 2021 that they should not proceed with a consultation on all-out elections at this time. This resolution was approved. This decision means that three-member wards will continue. The report on the matter can be found [here](#).

### Options considered

#### Reduction in members

We have considered whether a smaller Council could provide effective strategic leadership, accountability and community leadership in Harlow but are of the view that any reduction in the number of councillors would mean that current Governance arrangements would be difficult to support and place heavy workloads on councillors inhibiting their capacity. Arrangements for decision

making are finely balanced at the moment and decreasing the number of members against that backdrop would make this harder to sustain effectiveness.

Any reduction in numbers would also result in an increased workload for Councillors across their constituency engagement and casework.

With continued population growth the level of constituency casework is expected to remain the same or increase placing a significantly higher demand on a fewer number of Councillors.

All but two members of the Council have representational roles on main committees, most are also substitutes or reserves on other committees. A reduction in members would mean that members would be required to increase their committee attendances significantly.

It is agreed cross party that a reduction of any number of Councillors is not considered acceptable and would not allow the Council to continue to provide the present level of representation.

### **No change**

We have considered whether the current number of members is appropriate. Clearly, the authority has been able to effectively operate over a period of time with its current number of Councillors and there are now obviously differences in representational ratios which are showing in the differing views expressed in the returns to the member survey.

In terms of neighbourhood identity, the current arrangements have become out of tolerance in a number of areas of the town. We foresee that a redistribution based upon merely re-warding the town has limited flexibility in allowing the unique neighbourhood structures to be taken account of, forcing non-natural boundary solutions being required at the second stage of the process. We would wish that any solution maintained this unique neighbourhood structure as far as could be achieved.

Remaining at 33 Councillors means a likely average increase in time spent by Councillors on case work on top of their other Council duties and outside commitments over the period of reviewed growth and into the longer term given population increases forecast to 2033 by the Local Plan.

### **Limited Growth**

There is general support to the argument that a small increase (say a further ward of three members) would assist in maintaining the current levels of time spent on average by councillors on the whole range of their Council duties.

The projected population growth to 2028 based on ONS forecasts is 89,595 and the anticipated population increase based on Local Plan allocations and housing commitments by 2028 would be an additional 8480 persons. It is

evident that this will drive workload up, not just through a greater population but through casework associated with developments before they are built.

The case work from an increased electorate and their allocation to committee places would be spread across more councillors, meaning they could provide better community representation and leadership.

It is noted from the Councillor survey results that currently Councillors feel they can cope with their workload. However, discussions at the Electoral Review Working Group have demonstrated that Councillors feel they will either not be able to cope with their workload in the next few years, or will have to select which casework they take on. There was also consensus that they currently do not have the capacity to take on extra work. A better service to residents would be provided if workload was spread over more Councillors.

Analysis of the Councils neighbouring authorities and similar New Towns shows that Harlow already sits above the local representational average:

| <b>COUNCIL</b>        | <b>POPULATION<br/>(Mid 2019)</b> | <b>NO.<br/>COUNCILLORS</b> | <b>POP. PER<br/>COUNCILLOR</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| BRAINTREE             | 151,561                          | 49                         | 3,093                          |
| BRENTWOOD             | 77,021                           | 37                         | 2,082                          |
| BROXBOURNE            | 97,279                           | 30                         | 3,243                          |
| EAST HERTS            | 149,748                          | 50                         | 2,995                          |
| EPPING FOREST         | 131,689                          | 58                         | 2,271                          |
| UTTLESFORD            | 91,284                           | 39                         | 2,341                          |
| STEVENAGE             | 87,754                           | 39                         | 2,250                          |
| <b>HARLOW</b>         | <b>87,300</b>                    | <b>33</b>                  | <b>2,645</b>                   |
| AVERAGE (Excl Harlow) | 112,334                          | 43.14                      | 2,611                          |

We believe that a small increase in member representation would be prudent. It would also help alleviate the potential for politically foreseen difficulties were the political balance changed, allowing greater flexibility in its governance arrangements.

We are therefore advocating a change from 33 to 36 members and by extension 12 rather the existing 11 wards.