

Initial Response from LGBCE

“The last review – at a time when the Council operated a committee system – reduced the number of councillors from 42 to 33. Since that time, the authority has moved to a Cabinet model and a more limited committee structure focused around scrutiny and statutory/regulatory functions. No governance issues have been raised by any inspections or similar and there is an acceptance that such structures remain fit for purpose. This suggests that the existing number of councillors remains appropriate for the governance of the council, and therefore the argument for an increase is dependent on member workload brought about through an increasing population, particularly as the submission notes that workload relating to outside bodies is reported not to be a concern.

As a consequence of the change in legislation, Harlow’s council size will need to be divisible by three and therefore we do acknowledge that any increase (or decrease) in council size will need to be in multiples of three, rather than one or two. However, at the moment we’d suggest that these workload arguments are not necessarily persuasive to support an increase. We note that casework numbers have increased from 557 total year to 949 in eight months, but at the moment we can’t see the link between this total number and the effect this has on the number of councillors required. Is the support/technology in place insufficient to enable the existing number of members to handle this workload? Is there anything about the complexity of workload that makes (or will make) the existing number of members unsustainable? You also note that ‘Generally councillors feel able to cope’, and so it does seem to be the case at present that the existing number is appropriate. We would need further analysis on the workload arguments in order for our commissioners to be persuaded of the increase.”