Council Size Submission

Colchester City Council

Contents

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.

Colchester City Council – approved by Full Council   7 December 2023

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

Please explain the authority's reasons for requesting this electoral review; it is useful for the Commission to have context. *NB/ If the Commission has identified the authority for review under one if its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*

Identified by the Commission

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?

Colchester City Council has operated the Cabinet and Leader model of governance since 2001 and is kept under review There is no desire to change the model of governance, as it has operated effectively and efficiently and has provided transparent and stable administrations.

The former Borough underwent an Electoral review by the Commission in 2015. Prior to this, the Council was made up of 60 Councillors, representing 27 wards of varying sizes. There were a number of 1 and 2 member wards. The review resulted in a reduction to 51 Councillors representing 17 wards each with 3 members. The new Council came into being following whole council elections on 5 May 2016.

No governance or capacity issues have been raised by any Inspectorate. The Council underwent an LGA Peer Review in September 2022. A copy of the report of the Peer Review is here. The Peer Review highlighted that:-

- With the opportunities afforded by their plans for growth, the new Member and Officer Leadership team and, most crucially, city status, the City Council and Colchester, the place is on the cusp of something great.

- Colchester City Council has good self-awareness and understands the communities it serves and the economy across the borough.

- Colchester has an incredible heritage and culture offer that competes nationally and Colchester City Council has worked hard over the years to develop resilient and productive relationships and partnerships to ensure this heritage and cultural offer can thrive.

- Colchester City Council is driven and has a strong desire for achievement and delivery, with fantastic people, including staff, councillors, and partners.

The Peer Review made the following recommendations: -

1. Focus on city status. Use this is an opportunity to galvanise partners, improve the borough's economic and cultural strength and raise the voice of Colchester;

2. Get a firmer grip on the capital programme – manage all risks and improve your planning to ensure you have appropriate strategic finance, programme and project capacity and the resources to deliver;

3. Co-design a compelling and longer-term place-based narrative/city vision to define Colchester for the future;

4. Strengthen your political and officer 'leaders of place' roles and look beyond Colchester – map your anchor institutions, partners and stakeholders;

5. Review your priorities and projects and refocus on delivering 'Brilliant Business As Usual' and strengthen your corporate resources;

6. Strongly consider whether changing your election cycle will help you achieve your goals, ambitions and deliver improved services for Colchester's communities;

7. Better define with your staff what 'hybrid working' means for CBC and provide a clear definition. Also, clarify how the new CBC values will be designed and embedded, communicating to staff how these define the Council and will help achieve Colchester's ambition; and,

8. Commission an independent review of Colchester Commercial (Holdings) Ltd, and its subsidiaries, also undertake an internal review of Colchester Borough Homes to assess whether the companies are realising the benefits they were established to deliver.

In terms of the electoral cycle, the Council formed an all-party Working Group to consider alternative electoral arrangements. This recommended that consideration of changing the Council's electoral arrangements be deferred until the electoral review of Colchester was completed and implemented in 2026. This recommendation was accepted by Full Council at its meeting on 22 February 2023.

The Peer Review Team undertook a progress review in July 2023 and reported that significant progress had been made against the recommendations made by the Peer Review. The report of the progress review is here.

Colchester City Council is actively involved in ongoing discussions about devolution in Essex. It is understood that work is progressing towards a Level 2 devolution deal. This would establish a Greater Essex Combined Authority which would see Essex County Council and the unitary authorities of Southend and Thurrock working together on issues relating to skills, transport planning and the functions of the Local Enterprise Partnership. Colchester City Council would look to make its influence felt on any discussions on devolution.

The overall number of formal meetings of the Council Committee and Panels has been increasing over recent years. The table below sets out the figures for total number of formal meetings of the Committees and Panels over recent years.

	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-34 (Meetings to date and those currently scheduled)
Total number of meetings	71	65	72	78	89	80

No recommendation is being made by the Authority regarding Council size. Individual political groups will be making their own submissions on Council size.

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?

Colchester was awarded City Status by her late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II in 2022 as part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations and officially became a city on 23 November 2022 when the Letters Patent conferring city status were received by the Full Council.

The City of Colchester covers an area of 324 square kilometres in northeast Essex. It borders Suffolk in the north, along with three Essex Districts – Tendring to the east, Maldon to the southwest and Braintree to the west. It has a significant coastline. At its core is the historic city centre which is surrounded by villages and smaller towns of distinct and complementary character. It includes part of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The largest towns are Wivenhoe and West Mersea. The island of Mersea is at the south of the city and forms the city's principal coastal area. The city centre of Colchester, broadly defined as the area within the Roman city walls is a focal point for the whole city – containing one of the East of England' busiest shopping destinations, as well as nationally important heritage, including Colchester Castle, several Arts Council England National Partner Organisations and other cultural and leisure attractions.

Colchester hosts the University of Essex with 17,000 students, predicted to grow to 25,000 in 10 years. It is one of the leading research institutions in the country. Colchester also hosts a garrison and is home to 16 Air Assault Brigade.

Colchester continues to grow in popularity as a place to live and work. The city's current population is 192,700, an increase of 11.3% from 173000 in 2011 (ONS, 2022). With an estimated number of households of 79,300 it is home to 13% of Essex's population making it the largest district in the county (ONS, 2021). Colchester is growing at a faster rate than the rest of Essex and its population is expected to grow to 225,200 people by 2031 (East of England Forecasting Model 2021) an increase of 17% on the current level.

Colchester is currently the third largest district council in England (ONS). Since 2011, Colchester has seen significant growth in younger age groups, particularly people in their 20s (ONS). Additionally, in 2020 17.2% of people in Colchester were of retirement age (ONS). Colchester's population is rapidly becoming more diverse, with an increase in ethnic minority residents from 7.9% in 2009 to 8% in 2020.

Colchester has a thriving economy with a diverse range of 8750 businesses worth an estimated Gross Value Added of £4.43 bn. Key growth sectors for Colchester include tourism, care, construction, green energy and creative, digital and tech enabled by the significant investment in ultrafast gigabit broadband. Colchester attracts a significant number of workers from outside the city and is an employment hub for North Essex and South Suffolk.

Recent years have seen an estimated £634m investment which have transformed the experience of the town: including new hotels, visitor attractions, new spaces for businesses, improved retail, new sport and leisure facilities, expansion of the University of Essex, cutting-edge connectivity and town centre regeneration. These investments are just beginning to bear fruit - driving employment, transferable skills, new business opportunities and creating a new, contemporary tourism image for Colchester to complement its historic reputation.

The City is partly parished with 29 parish, town and community councils.

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		
	Key lines of explanation	➢ *What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?* ➢ *The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?* ➢ *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.* ➢ *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?* ➢ *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.*
Governance Model	Analysis	The Council comprises 51 Councillors, who are elected by thirds. The current political balance on the Council is: Conservative 19 Liberal Democrat 16 Labour 14 Green 2 The Council is run by a minority Liberal Democrat administration, with support on a supply and confidence arrangement from the Labour group. Colchester City Council operates a Strong Leader/Cabinet system. This is well established and there is no desire across the political spectrum to change to a Committee system. The current Cabinet is made up of eight Councillors and this has been the case in most administrations in recent years, except 2021/22 when the Cabinet was made up of six members. The precise responsibilities and titles of the Portfolios change over time to reflect political priorities and pressures.

		Major strategic and operational policies are approved by Cabinet, and if they are part of the Policy Framework are adopted by Full Council. There is a culture of seeking wider members views before major strategic decisions are taken. It is common for major policies to be subject to pre-scrutiny by the Scrutiny Panel and/or to be considered by the Policy Panel or Environment and Sustainability Panel whilst policy is developed. As a consequence, the demands made on members of the Committees and Panels are growing.

There is also a programme of member briefings which often inform members of major policies as they are developed and in particular a programme of budget workshops which are used to seek member views and give members an opportunity to influence the budget as it is developed.

It is anticipated that the Council will seek to maintain a Strong Leader/Cabinet model. It is felt that this provides the ability for transparent, effective and quick decision making. As operated in Colchester, there is the ability for other Committees and Panels to make a meaningful contribution to major policy and operational decisions in a constructive way. The ability to call in decisions, whilst used rarely, provides a balance to power of the executive and ensures that Cabinet engages with scrutiny processes.

Cabinet works closely with Senior Leadership Board (SLB), which provides the strategic management of the Council and monitors its strategic performance. Cabinet members meet with the SLB every two weeks in Leadership Board meetings. The officers who comprise SLB are as follows: -
Chief Executive
Chief Operating Officer
Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director Place
Strategic Director (x 3)
A wider Senior Leadership Team comprises SLB and Heads of Service. |
| **Portfolios** | *Key lines of explanation* | ➢ *How many portfolios will there be?*
➢ *What will the role of a portfolio holder be?*
➢ *Will this be a full-time position?*
➢ *Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?* |

		There are currently eight members of the Cabinet, The current portfolios are as follows: - Portfolio Holder for Strategy (held by the Leader of the Council) Communities Economy, Performance and Transformation Housing Leisure, Culture and Heritage Neighbourhoods and Waste Planning, Environment and Sustainability Resources (held by the Deputy Leader of the Council). The current scheme of delegation to Cabinet members showing the responsibilities is here. All portfolios are considered to be full portfolios with broadly similar workloads and areas of responsibility. The scheme of delegation sets out those areas and responsibilities which the Leader of the Council has delegated to individual portfolio holders. Portfolio holders are encouraged to take decisions under delegated powers outside of formal Cabinet meetings and there is a clear process for such decisions., although the number of decisions taken across portfolios can vary widely. Cabinet posts are demanding and busy roles. Cabinet meets 7-8 times a year to take formal decisions, with meetings lasting approximately two hours, and with a coordinating meeting to help set the agenda before each meeting. Cabinet also meets with SLB every two weeks in Leadership Board meetings to formulate policy and drive the strategic direction of the Council. Cabinet members lead on their portfolios whilst also working collectively as a Cabinet. They meet with senior officers relating to their portfolios regularly in Portfolio Holder briefings. Cabinet members also represent the Council on a number of Joint Committees and outside bodies. With the growing emphasis on partnership working this element of the role is of increasing importance. The Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Resources in particular also routinely attend meetings of the Council's Scrutiny and Policy Panels, and Governance and Audit Committee. Some Cabinet members are also in full time employment and the working practices of the Council reflect that, with most member meetings scheduled as evening meetings.
	Analysis	

		There have been eight portfolios in each administration in recent years, except 2021/22 when there were six. It is anticipated that going forward, the Council would require a Cabinet of eight members to successfully manage the workload of executive decision making.
Delegated Responsibilities	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?* ➢ *How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?*
	Analysis	The principal and practice of delegating decision making and responsibilities to officers and Committees is well established. The current scheme of delegation to Cabinet members showing the responsibilities is <u>here</u>. The current scheme of delegation to officers is <u>here</u>. The current scheme of delegation to regulatory Committees is <u>here</u>. It is anticipated that the emphasis on delegating decisions to officers where appropriate and to give considerable freedom to Cabinet members to take delegated decisions would continue.

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.
Key lines of explanation	➢ *How will decision makers be held to account?* ➢ *How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?* ➢ *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?* ➢ *How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?*

Analysis	The Cabinet (Executive) is held to account by the Scrutiny Panel. The terms of reference of the Panel are here. The Panel is chaired by an opposition member. Executive decisions are called in for review by the Scrutiny Panel relatively rarely. However, the performance of individual Portfolio Holders is reviewed by the Panel. Significant policy and operational decisions are often referred for pre-scrutiny before Cabinet, with the Panel encouraged to make recommendations to the Cabinet. This has reduced the need for call in. The Executive are keen to work in a collegiate way and are keen to consider the views of the Scrutiny Panel and would rather work constructively rather than through continual challenge. The Panel also meets twice a year as the Crime and Disorder Committee to meet to review or scrutinise decisions or other actions taken in connection with its functions in respect of crime and disorder. The Panel can also ask for items to be added to its work programme. The work programme is reviewed at each meeting. The workload of the Scrutiny Panel has increased over recent years, with a number of additional meetings being scheduled. For example, the Panel met on 12 occasions in 2022-23, which included the scheduling of 3 additional meetings. There has also been some crossover with the work of the Governance and Audit Committee, particularly around the scrutiny of the Council's companies and the Council has clarified the

		position by designating the Governance and Audit Committee as the Shareholder Committee for Council owned companies.
		The Scrutiny Panel can establish Task and Finish Groups to look at issues in greater depth and a number of Task and Finish Groups have been set up in the past. There are no current Task and Finish Groups, but the Council would want to retain this as an option going forward.
Statutory Function		This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?
	Key lines of explanation	➢ *What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?* ➢ *Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?* ➢ *Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?* ➢ *Will executive members serve on the planning committees?* ➢ *What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?*
Planning	Analysis	The Full Council has delegated its planning functions to the Planning Committee. There is a further scheme of delegation from the Planning Committee to officers which is here. Members can also call-in planning applications so that they are considered by the Planning Committee, although valid planning reasons must be given. Under the scheme of delegation 97% of applications are determined by officers. Details on numbers of planning applications received over recent years are set out below: -

		2018 Largescale Majors = 9 Smallscale Majors = 51 Minor = 391 Other = 1295 **Total = 1,746** **2019** Largescale Majors = 14 Smallscale Majors = 65 Minor = 386 Other = 1267 **Total = 1,732** **2020** Largescale Majors = 14 Smallscale Majors = 48 Minor = 331 Other = 1423 **Total = 1,816** **2021** Largescale Majors = 12 Smallscale Majors = 44 Minor = 376 Other = 1586 **Total = 2,018** **2022** Largescale Majors = 8 Smallscale Majors = 37 Minor = 329 Other = 1358 **Total = 1,732**

		There is one single Planning Committee which covers the whole City. This arrangement has worked well and it is not proposed to change to a system of Area Committees. The Planning Committee has ten members and currently meets every three weeks, although the frequency of meetings is kept under review. Members are required to undertake training before sitting on the Committee, which must be refreshed every two years. A typical agenda will have 3 items and last on average 1.5 hours. The Planning Committee will sometimes undertake site visits in advance of determining an application. These visits are usually undertaken on the afternoon before the meeting - the Committee visited 16 sites on 7 separate occasions in the 2022-23 municipal year. Membership of the Planning Committee involves a considerable time commitment. There is no constitutional bar to executive members sitting on Planning Committee, but it happens rarely, and no current executive member is also a member of the Planning Committee.
	Key lines of explanation	➤ *How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?* ➤ *And what will be the time commitment for members?* ➤ *Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?* ➤ *Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?*
Licensing	Analysis	The Licensing Committee has twelve members and has six scheduled meetings as a Full Committee per annum. However, there are normally approximately 8 meetings per annum as a Sub Committee or Panel to consider hackney carriage or alcohol licensing applications. The membership of these needs to be drawn from the full Committee. Members are also required to undertake training before sitting on Sub Committees and Panels, which must be refreshed every two years. Therefore, membership

		of the Licensing Committee involves a considerable time commitment.
		On occasions there has been difficulty finding sufficient members to sit on Sub Committee and Panels, given the number of hearings and members other commitments. There would be merit in having a larger Licensing Committee with a wider pool of members to draw from.
Other Regulatory Bodies	*Key lines of explanation*	*➢ What will they be, and how many members will they require?* *➢ Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.*
	Analysis	The Council's Governance and Audit Committee is responsible for the Council's regulatory functions in respect of audit, governance and standards issues. Its terms of reference are <u>here</u>. In summary it considers and approves the Statement of Accounts and receives the Council's annual audit letter. It also deals with the Council's governance, risk management and audit arrangements and a number of miscellaneous regulatory matters relating to elections and Community Governance Reviews. It manages the Standards and conduct regime for members, including Hearings Sub-Committees where allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct are determined. It is also acts as the Shareholder Committee for the Council owned companies, Colchester Commercial (Holdings) Limited and Colchester Borough Homes Limited. Over recent years the workload of the Committee has increased. This is partly in response to a sharpened focus and interest in some elements of the Committee's work, particular the auditing of Council accounts and increased focus on the management and performance of the Council owned companies. The terms of the reference of the Committee have been amended to ensure a consistency of approach between the Councill owned companies:

	Colchester Commercial (Holdings) Limited and Colchester Borough Homes Limited.
	This has led to an increased demand on members of the Committee and the need to schedule several additional meetings. For example, 4 additional meetings plus a Sub Committee hearing were scheduled in 2022-2023 municipal year and the Committee has already directed that a further two meetings be scheduled in the current municipal year. It is anticipated that this trend will continue and that there will be an increased workload for the Committee, which has a comparatively small membership of 7.
External Partnerships	Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
Key lines of explanation	➢ *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?* ➢ *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?* ➢ *What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?*
Analysis	The Cabinet approves the appointment of representatives to serve on external bodies and Council groups at its meeting on an annual basis at the first meeting of the municipal year. The current list of appointments can be seen here. In total, 20 Councillors are appointed to at least one body. The majority of appointments are made to Cabinet members, and most Cabinet members are appointed to several bodies. For example, the Leader of the Council is appointed to five bodies.

	Of particular significance are Joint Committees where Councillors are appointed to serve alongside representatives of other authorities to deliver a combined service or joint project. This is an increasingly common way of delivering services, and the Council makes appointments to three such Committees: - • North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee • Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service Joint Committee • Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community Joint Committee With the increased emphasis on working in partnership and delivering services and major projects alongside partners, these appointments are increasingly important, and members are dedicating increasing amounts of time to these roles.

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
	Key lines of explanation	➢ *In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?* ➢ *Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?* ➢ *How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?* ➢ *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?* ➢ *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?* ➢ *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?*
Community Leadership	Analysis	The Council has conducted a survey of Members to ascertain information on workload and how they approach their representational role and how they deal with casework. The survey was completed by 29 out of the 51 members of Council. Details of the responses can be seen here. Some of the key points are:- • The key motivations to become a Councillor were to serve the community and to change things. • Councillors spend a considerable amount of time on their role each week. The most common response to each element of the role was as follows: - Reading reports – more than 15 hour per week Researching – up to 5 hours per week Attending Council Meetings – up to 5 hours per week Dealing with Casework – up to 5 hours per week Serving on outside bodies – up to 5 hours per week • The most time-consuming element of the role was reading reports. 10 Councillors indicated they spent more than 15 hours per week reading reports. • The amount of time spent on each element of the role was broadly in line with expectations. • Of those Councillors who were in post before the last series of ward changes in 2016, the majority felt that the number of hours they spent on Council business since then had increased.

		• A significant minority also held a position as either a town/parish councillor or a county councillor and more than half were appointed to at least one outside body. • Half of Councillors who responded held monthly surgeries. 3 Councillors indicated that they never held surgeries. • Councillors used a wide range of methods to engage with residents. Social media ranked highly and there was widespread agreement that technology had changed the way Councillors worked. However, traditional leaflets remained the most common method. • Facebook was by far the most used method of social media, followed by Twitter/X. • Some of the most relevant comments made by Councillors on the impact of technology were as follows: *The advent of E Mail and MS Teams (etc) makes it easier and quicker to both communicate with Constituents and Officers - as well as be given more work to do (!) On balance it has meant probably twice and sometimes three times as much work to do.* *Online agendas are fantastic and useful to refer back to. Social media a huge part of resident contact.* *I am able to do more but as a result case load has risen significantly more- it makes councillors more accessible* • Half of Councillors who responded felt they had about as much influence as expected. • Some of the most relevant comments made in the general comments section on workload overall are as follows:- *The workload has increased excessively since the reduction to 51 Councillors both by making wards larger and more diverse and having fewer Councillor means more committee meetings and having to substitute more.* *The role I currently hold is a great deal of work, its 7 days a week from early morning and often till late at night.* *The expectations of councillors is far greater than the recompense. Facilities available should reflect the increasing requirements (ie. technology support/provision, easier access to officer resource, adequate group accommodation, facility to mingle with opposition members before meetings, free/reduced fee access to council provision in order to promote museums, sports facilities, events, etc.)*
Casework	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *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?*

		➢ *What support do members receive?*
		➢ *How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?*
		➢ *In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?*
	Analysis	The Councillor survey referred to above also addressed how Councillors deal with casework. This highlighted that the majority of Councillors who responded combined taking an independent approach with seeking help from officers. Whilst officers will respond to Councillors queries on casework, there is no centralised process for dealing with Councillor casework. Issues relating to the use of technology are addressed in the previous answer. Residents are encouraged to contact the Council direct with queries and problems and there is a central customer service team.

Other Issues

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

New Technology
- Increasing ease for constituents and public to contact Councillors, through email / social media, and expect an immediate response
- Ease for officers to contact Lead Councillors (and vice versa)
- Greater openness, accountability and challenge, also promoted by Freedom of Information Act, and blogsites

Summary

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

1) Colchester City Council currently has 51 Councillors, representing 17 wards. It wishes to continue to be elected by thirds. It has therefore looked at options for size that are divisible by three – i.e., 45, 51 and 54 but the political groups were unable to reach a consensus.

2) Councillors from all parties are actively involved in decision making. Currently 65% of all Councillors are in receipt of Special Responsibility Allowances as Cabinet Members, chairs, vice chairs or members of regulatory committees, to recognise the extra work requirement for these roles.

3) Around half of all Councillors hold positions which receive Special Responsibility Allowance. There is a need for capacity and time to support making an effective balance between leadership and ward responsibilities, including having a balance within wards between back-benchers and councillors with recognised roles in the decision-making process.

4) In addition, as a long-standing arrangement, the Council supports and participates in a broad range of community and partnership bodies.

5) Councillors from all groups are generally active in engaging with and representing their wards and constituents, including holding surgeries and meetings, issuing ward newsletters and running their own blogsites (independently of the City Council).

6) Surveys by the Independent Remuneration Panel found Councillors reporting working at least 40-60 hours a month on their range of Councillor duties. This includes active involvement in local neighbourhood forums and community hubs, as well as ward work with individual constituents. In 2021 a survey by the Independent Remuneration Panel found that the work profile of Councillors had changed with a great increase in online communications such as social media, making elected councillors more directly accountable to and contactable by their electorate, who expect responses by return.