

Review of Polling Districts and Places

East Area Panel, item 4

Committee:	East Area Panel	Agenda Item
Date:	15 October 2007	4
Title:	Review of Polling Districts and Places	
Author:	Peter Snow, Electoral Services Officer, 01799 510431	Item for decision

Summary

The Council is required, under Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, to complete a review of its polling districts and polling places within 12 months of the date on which Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 came into force, and every four years thereafter. The relevant date for completion of the review is the end of 2007. In effect, to enable any changes in electoral arrangements to be reflected in the revised register of electors published on 30 November 2007, the review must be completed by no later than mid November, and will take effect on the day of publication.

This report contains recommendations for that part of the existing scheme falling within the Area Panel's jurisdiction. The entire scheme will be submitted to the Finance and Administration Committee for approval on 15 November, as required by the Council's delegation arrangements.

Recommendations

That the Area Panel recommends the adoption of a suitable scheme of polling districts and places, insofar as it applies to those wards and parishes included within the territory administered by the relevant panel, and that the scheme so recommended will be incorporated into a revised scheme covering the entire district.

Background Papers

Polling District Review file, including responses to the public consultation, other background papers, and relevant maps.

The schedule of existing arrangements dated 1 December 2006, and associated maps and other material.

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Communication/Consultation	The Returning Officer of the Parliamentary constituency, the Member of Parliament for Saffron Walden, Essex County Council and county councillors within Uttlesford, district councillors, parish councils, members of the public and any other interested party to the review.
Community Safety	No specific impact.
Equalities	Consultation with Uttlesford Access Group on behalf of electors with a disability.
Finance	No financial implication beyond the requirement to meet necessary hire costs of buildings used for polling purposes.
Human Rights	No specific implications.
Legal implications	The need to ensure the Council complies with statutory obligations as described in the report.
Sustainability	Not directly applicable.
Ward-specific impacts	All wards.
Workforce/Workplace	No specific impact except where indicated.

Situation

- 1 Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA) places a duty on district councils to divide their area into polling districts, to designate a polling place for each polling district, and to keep them under review. This duty applies for the purpose of Parliamentary elections but the RPA also allows a county or district council to divide an area for the election of its councillors. In practice, the arrangements for all types of election are generally identical and the scheme is set accordingly.
- 2 Members may recall that a full review was carried out last year. This was to enable fresh arrangements to be put in place for the local elections in May 2007. It was intended that the review would not be signed off before the 2006 Act provisions came into force, so that a further review would not be required for four years. In the event, the coming into force of Section 16 was delayed and a new review was therefore commenced on 30 July 2007.

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- 3 Although a full review was carried out as recently as last year, it will be seen from the report that some amendments to the scheme are being suggested and it is hoped that further changes will not be needed in the immediate future.
- 4 The rules applicable to this process are:
 - a. All electors must be given such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable.
 - b. Each parish must, unless there are special circumstances, be a separate polling district.
 - c. The polling place shall be an area in the polling district, except where special circumstances make this undesirable, and shall be small enough to make it identifiable.
 - d. A polling place need not be designated if this does not materially affect the convenience of electors, but if no polling place is designated the polling district is to be taken to be the polling place.
 - e. As far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place must be accessible to disabled electors; the authority must also have regard to the accessibility to disabled persons of potential polling stations in any polling place so designated, or any place it is reviewing.
- 5 A **polling district** (PD) is a defined geographical area that is either the same as, or a sub-division of, an electoral area (usually a parish, or where a parish is divided into more than one ward, that ward, or a sub-division of it).
- 6 A **polling place** (PP) may either be a building, a geographical area within the polling district, or the entire polling district, depending on the circumstances. It is literally the 'place' that electors must visit to record their vote.
- 7 A **polling station** is the room or specific part of a building where the poll takes place. The allocation of polling stations is at the discretion of the returning officer and therefore outside the scope of this review, but if the designated polling place is defined as a building, the polling station can only be allocated within that building.

The Consultation Process

- 8 The review commenced on 30 July 2007 and was publicised by notice at the London Road offices and on the Council's website. Letters of consultation were sent to Sir Alan Haselhurst MP, Alasdair Bovaird as Returning Officer for the Saffron Walden constituency, Essex County Council, county councillors representing Uttlesford, all district councillors in a ward representational capacity, and parish councils and parish meetings in the district.
- 9 It is now a requirement under the revised legislation to consult the relevant returning officer and, in turn, that returning officer must respond commenting

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specifically on all existing polling stations and any new polling stations under consideration (or any that he thinks should be considered).

- 10 A letter was also sent to the Secretary of the Uttlesford Access Group regarding the accessibility of buildings as there is a new duty on the Council to seek representations from persons having particular expertise in disabled access issues.
- 11 Accompanying the consultation letter was a copy of the notice publicising the review, together with draft proposed changes to the existing scheme (prepared by the electoral services officer), and a schedule of existing arrangements. These are all set out as appendices to this report.
- 12 Responses to the consultation were requested by 10 September 2007. As so often with exercises of this nature, the number of representations received has proved extremely disappointing.
- 13 Those responses that have been received are summarised below:
 - Ashdon and Broxton Parish Councils had no comments to make. No other parish councils responded at all.
 - Hatfield Heath Village Hall Trust wrote responding to a letter of December 2006 regarding disabled access issues. This matter will be addressed in a separate section of the report.
 - Alasdair Bovaird wrote in his capacity of Returning Officer (as he is required to do) referring specifically to a number of matters concerning individual polling districts, places and stations. These comments are summarised elsewhere in the report and the letter itself is included in full as an appendix to this report.
- 14 Unfortunately, therefore, the Council must proceed to form a revised polling scheme without significant assistance from the public consultation exercise.

Access Arrangements

- 15 As part of the 2006 review, arrangements were made for a survey to be carried out by the Essex Disabled People's Association (EDPA) to assess the buildings currently used against the criteria set out in paragraph 4e.
- 16 The EDPA survey identified a number of problems with some of the buildings designated as polling places, that were considered serious enough to place doubt on their future use. Those buildings are:
 - Ashdon Village Hall; Broxton Village Hall; Duddenhoe End Village Hall; Elmdon Village Hall; Great Canfield Church Hall; High Roding WI Hall; Little Hallingbury Village Hall; Manuden Village Hall; Newport Village Hall; Quendon and Rickling Village Hall; and Stansted Youth Centre.

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- 17 Letters were sent to the responsible body for each of the above in December 2006, as well as to the responsible body for other premises where some problems with access had been highlighted. As some of the management bodies had not responded, a further letter was sent in early September. A summary of those responses received is set out below:
- Ashdon Village Hall Management Committee commented that the old part of the village hall is a listed building and cannot be altered internally. Ramps are available and wheelchair users have been able to access the building satisfactorily. The front door of the new part of the hall is the best entrance option for a wheelchair user and it is easy to access the old part of the hall (used for polling) from there. It would be possible to tarmac a small area near to the new entrance to overcome the problem of loose pea shingle. Funds are limited and the committee would appreciate help with funding to make any improvements.
 - Broxton Village Hall Committee commented that the car park is shingled and was recently resurfaced with the help of a grant from Essex County Council. The cost of tarmac would be prohibitive. The steps to the hall do not have a hand rail, and the step nosings are not highlighted. Disabled access is by way of a level path to the rear of the building. The Parish Council is planning further work and will ensure the nosings and handrail are incorporated.
 - Duddenhoe End Village Hall Committee commented that the Parish Council (Elmdon and Wenden Lofts) is in the process of preparing a planning permission for the provision of a bus shelter, incorporating a porch to the hall. The hall committee has requested the provision of a ramp and handrail to the front of the hall as part of this project, which will address the major access problems identified by EDPA. If this is not successful, the committee will have to seek funding support from elsewhere.
 - Elmdon Village Hall Committee commented that a concrete path has been added to the front and rear of the building, incorporating a gently sloping ramp, and that the door at the rear of the building is wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair.
 - Mr Purves on behalf of Great Canfield PCC commented about the Church Hall that 'I do not see any problem with providing small ramps to eliminate the threshold into the hall for wheelchair users. I am slightly surprised that the car parking area is thought to pose problems; although mainly of gravel the surface is very solid and I would not have thought that it would be difficult to cross.'
 - The Chairman/Secretary of Little Hallingbury Village Hall states that: the handrail and nosings are now painted white; the portable wooden ramps have been made to fit the alternative entrance – the committee's view on changing these ramps is that whatever material

is used, anyone in a wheelchair will need assistance; the 40mm threshold has been lowered to 15mm; wheelchair users do not enter the hall by the main entrance – the mat at the alternative entrance is in a sunken well and is easily negotiated by wheelchair users and the visually impaired.

- The Chairman of Manuden Village Hall Committee comments that the village hall is the only public building available in the village (although there is a primary school). She says that the committee acknowledges its shortcomings in terms of location and condition but is hopeful that a new hall will soon be built. A planning permission will be submitted in the near future as funding has been secured via a local landowner in exchange for new housing. The committee is understandably reluctant to invest in upgrading the hall at this stage. If the planning permission should fail, then the committee will commission major refurbishment work, to be completed when funds are available. She concludes by expressing a hope that the new attempt to secure funding will be successful and provides an assurance that the portable ramp will be in position when needed.
- The Newport Village Hall Chairman commented: 'Newport Village Hall management Committee has been raising funds over the past year to undertake a major refurbishment of the Hall. As part of the project, it is intended to improve the access to and services within the Hall for people with disabilities. The Committee will be shortly placing orders valued in excess of £100,000 for the first phase of the work. This initial stage will replace the existing roof; upgrade the toilets to include the provision of accessible facilities for disabled people; provide an induction loop system for people with hearing difficulties and to improve the frontage of the building. The remaining work will begin as soon as funds permit and hopefully will rectify many of the faults of the present ageing structure.' The letter goes on to refer to the specific points raised by the original EDPA survey. The difficulty of negotiating the uneven access route from the car park to the entrance will be met by replacing the existing slabs with block paving. It is intended to replace the curved steps with a smoothed ramp. The present ramp leads to double fire doors but one of these does not open flat. The door will be re-hung so that a 1400mm entrance can be provided. Finally, the coconut matting will be replaced once the building work is completed.
- On behalf of Quendon and Rickling Village Hall, Christine Osbourn advises that there are no funds available to tarmac the car park; they are awaiting an estimate to re-hang the outer door so that a handrail and rail can be installed; a new floor was laid in the small hall and a new mat well was provided last Christmas. They are about to make a second application for lottery funding. There was previously some

discussion about building a new hall but no progress has been made so they are continuing as best they can.

- Essex County Council Youth Service commented about Stansted Youth Centre that DDA work was carried out on the premises during 2006 and it conforms to the requirements laid down by ECC.

- 18 A summary of the survey findings relating to the eleven buildings listed above is set out as an appendix to this report. The full survey results can be viewed in the electoral office.
- 19 Members are asked to consider those responses relating to their specific area. Broxton is in the East panel area (as is High Roding for which no response has been received); Ashdon, Duddenhoe End, Elmdon, Newport, and Quendon and Rickling are in the North panel area; and Great Canfield, Little Hallingbury, and Stansted are in the South-West area.
- 20 The comments of the Access Group are set out in the attached appendix and Members are asked to take these into account. Clearly, as the Council has no funds available, the only route open to the owners of these buildings is to pursue funding from other sources, such as grant funding. The option of utilising mobile Police vehicles will be examined.
- 21 Members may wish to decide, in the light of the comments reported and of the Council's statutory responsibilities, whether any of the access problems are so severe as to warrant finding an alternative polling venue in any of these cases. At Ashdon, Little Hallingbury, Manuden, and Newport, there are school facilities that could be designated instead. The problems reported at Stansted appear to have been resolved, while many of the other matters highlighted are being addressed.
- 22 In the other cases it seems that suitable alternative buildings may not be available. The officers' view is that these buildings should continue to be used unless they are demonstrated to be unsafe, or totally inaccessible.

The Existing Scheme and Options for Change

- 23 The existing scheme was approved by the Operations Committee on 28 September 2006 and came into force on 1 December. The draft proposals for change (see the attached appendix) were devised by officers and published on 30 July 2007 for the purposes of the consultation part of the review. The remainder of the report discusses possible options for change divided into the three panel areas for ease of consideration by Members.

East Area Panel

- 24 No specific comments are made in this report relating to any of the polling districts or places for the wards of **Barnston and High Easter, Stebbing,**

Thaxted, The Eastons and The Rodings as those arrangements are considered to be satisfactory.

25 In **Felsted ward**, the present arrangements in Felsted East and Felsted West are considered to be satisfactory and no changes are proposed.

26 However, it is **proposed to divide the existing polling district of Little Dunmow into two separate polling districts of Flitch Green and Little Dunmow based on the areas of the proposed new parish of Flitch Green and the revised parish of Little Dunmow.**

27 A proposal to create a new parish of Flitch Green (based on the housing development known as Oakwood Park) was submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in June 2007. The new parish is not expected to come into effect until either 2008, or at such later time as is agreed.

28 It is proposed that the polling district boundaries coincide exactly with that of the proposed new parish. Until such time as the parish is created by order, it will be necessary to define the boundary as follows:

Flitch Green – ‘The northern boundary to run along the edge of Oakwood Park immediately to the south of Gypsy Lane. The north-eastern boundary will follow the centre of Station Road to the point where it is crossed by Stebbing Brook; it will then follow the line of the Brook along the south-eastern boundary (coinciding, at this point, with the common boundary between Uttlesford and Chelmsford Borough). The western boundary will then follow first the nature reserve boundary, and then the development limits of Oakwood Park until it joins with the boundary at the north-western point.’

The revised Little Dunmow polling district would then consist of ‘that part of the existing parish of Little Dunmow not included in the Flitch Green polling district.’

29 It will be necessary to designate a polling place for the new polling district of Flitch Green. A 210 place primary school (to be known as Flitch Green Primary School) is presently under construction and was due to have opened in September this year. This has now been delayed until September next year. It is understood that a community centre will eventually be provided at Flitch Green also.

30 Members therefore seemingly have two options in deciding on the designation of an appropriate polling place at Flitch Green. One option is to designate the primary school as the polling place. The other option is not to designate a specific building at present allowing the Returning Officer the flexibility to make the most appropriate arrangements possible at the time of an election. In this case, the entire polling district (as defined in paragraph 28 above) would be designated as the polling place.

31 To cover the position in the interim period before the school (or any alternative community building) is available for use, it may be better to extend the limit for

the provision of a polling place to within one mile of the polling district boundary. This will allow electors at Flitch Green to continue to vote at the Flitch of Bacon Public House until alternative provision can be made.

32 On balance, therefore, although the school may prove the most suitable polling venue, **the option to designate the whole polling district as the polling place for Flitch Green, together with an area extending one mile beyond the polling district boundary, is the one suggested for adoption.** This decision can be reviewed either at the next scheduled review (in four years time) or at such time as an interim review becomes necessary.

33 It is further **proposed that the Flitch of Bacon public house continue to be designated as the polling place for Little Dunmow.**

34 The Returning Officer has commented that 'I agree with this proposal for two reasons. First, it anticipates the creation of the proposed parish and will therefore obviate the need for an interim review when the order creating the new parish is made. Second, it will reflect the reality on the ground of two separate and very different communities at Oakwood Park and the village of Little Dunmow.' He goes on to say that 'it is sensible that the school should be earmarked for this purpose although it would not be good practice to designate this building until the school authorities can be formally consulted. I therefore recommend the adoption of this proposal.'

35 It is therefore **recommended that the panel recommend the adoption of:**

- **the revised polling district arrangements set out in paragraph 26;**
- **the proposed boundary definitions set out in paragraph 28; and**
- **the proposed polling places set out in paragraphs 32 and 33 respectively.**

36 The report now turns to the arrangements for **Great Dunmow North and Great Dunmow South.**

37 In each case the draft proposals are for no change. However, further thought has now been given to this matter in view of the population increases projected for both Great Dunmow wards within the next few years. A glance at the table of four year electorate projections attached to this report as an appendix indicates that the electorate at Great Dunmow North ward is expected to rise by about 500 in that time and the electorate at Great Dunmow South by about 250. An increase of this nature would raise the electorates to some 3000 and nearly 4000 respectively. The combined electorate of the North and South wards already exceeds 6000.

38 Please refer also to the Returning Officer's comments in the relevant appendix. He suggests that consideration be given to making revised arrangements in both wards. At the moment, both wards form complete polling districts without being split down into more than one PD. Population

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trends suggest that this option should now be considered, especially in South ward.

- 39 The reasoning for this analysis is as follows. In North ward, the development of Woodlands Park will lead eventually to the construction of 1450 residential units. It is expected that there will eventually be between 4000 and 4500 electors in the ward. Separate provision will be needed for the 2500 electors in Woodlands Park and the 1800 electors in the remainder of the ward.
- 40 In South ward, the electorate is already in the region of 3650. Changes over the next four years will see that figure rise to somewhere in the region of 4000. The Returning Officer comments that the existing figure is already large enough to justify the creation of more than one PD. He takes the view that 3000 electors is the most that can comfortably be accommodated in one PD and the South ward should be divided now for that reason.
- 41 He suggests that a suitable boundary be devised in South ward and that the Dourdan Pavilion and the Foakes Hall be designated to accommodate the electors in Dunmow South between them. Since the Dourdan Pavilion is already the designated PP for North ward, it is suggested that the new primary school at Woodlands Park could then become the designated PP for that area. In time the North ward might need to be similarly divided but he does not propose that at the present time.
- 42 However, if members believe the convenience of electors in North ward living elsewhere than at Woodlands Park would be materially affected by this arrangement, then North ward should be divided now also.
- 43 The options available to members are as follows:
- Divide Great Dunmow South ward (as listed in paragraph 49 below) by the creation of two separate polling districts; the Dourdan Pavilion or another building (see suggestions below) would become the PP for Great Dunmow South-East and the Foakes Hall the PP for Great Dunmow South-West.
 - Divide South ward by means of an alternative boundary.
 - Divide North ward into two PDs, one for the Woodlands Park area, and the other for the remainder (see paragraph 46 for further details); designate Great Dunmow Primary School as the PP for Woodlands Park (Great Dunmow North-West); designate the Dourdan Pavilion as the PP for the remainder (Great Dunmow North-East).
 - Do not presently divide North ward for polling district purposes and designate either Great Dunmow Primary School or the Dourdan Pavilion as the PP for the entire PD.
- 44 On balance, officers now believe the best option is to divide both existing wards into two separate polling districts. In considering the options to achieve

that, Members should bear in mind the need to provide arrangements in which the convenience of electors is the primary consideration.

45 The need to divide the North ward is based on the different needs of two distinct residential areas at Woodlands Park and the north part of the town of Great Dunmow, including Church End. The argument to create two polling districts in the South ward is based firmly on the large and growing size of the electorate there and the need to make convenient arrangements for all electors.

46 If it is decided to divide North ward, the following suggestion is offered:

Great Dunmow North-West: that part of Great Dunmow North ward lying to the west of a line running from the ward boundary on Stortford Road northwards along the unmarked path leading to Newton Villas then skirting round the western and then the northern edge of Newton Villas, Newton Grove, Newton Green, and Waldgrooms then proceeding in a generally northerly direction along the western boundary of the Emblems development then proceeding to the parish boundary immediately to the west of Newton Hall.

The following streets will be incorporated within the polling district area: Acacia Drive, Aspen Terrace, Barberry Path, Birch Road, Cedar Close, Cherry Crescent, Chestnut View, Conifer Way, Cypress Court, Elm Road, Hazel Close, Holly Close, Holm Drive, Juniper Court, Laburnum Road, Larch Way, Laurel Drive, Maple Way, Pine Avenue, Rowan Way, Spruce Avenue, Stacey Court, Stortford Road (part – Canada Cottages only), Walnut Walk, Willow Road, Woodlands Park Drive, and Woodlands Walk.

On current figures (September 2007) there are 772 electors within the proposed polling district area.

Great Dunmow North-East: the remainder of Great Dunmow North ward not included in the Great Dunmow North-West polling district.

It would comprise all of the streets not included within Great Dunmow North-West.

On current figures there are 1769 electors within the proposed polling district.

47 No other boundary option is offered for consideration as the justification for the proposal is based on the sheer number of electors who will eventually populate Woodlands Park. If this proposal is not adopted now it seems inevitable that something similar will be required at the next review in four years time or at some stage during the interim period.

48 At **Dunmow South** there is a stronger case for making a change now as the number of electors has already reached a level that might become difficult to manage at a single polling location.

49 The suggested boundary is as follows:

Great Dunmow South-West: that part of Great Dunmow South ward lying to the south and then south-west of a line following the centre of Stortford Road, from the ward boundary at the junction with Rosemary Lane, and then High Street and Chelmsford Road to the eastern parish boundary.

The following streets will be incorporated into the proposed polling district area:

Angel Lane, Ash Grove, Chelmsford Road (except for a small portion containing three dwellings), Chequers Lane, Clapton Hall Lane, David Wright Close, Fitzwalter Place, Haslers Lane, Heywood Lane, High Meadow, High Street (evens), Highfields, Highstile, Lower Mill Field, Lukins Drive, Manse Gardens, New Street, New Street Fields, Nursery Rise, Oliveswood Road, Ongar Road, Pharisee Green, Philpot End, South View, Springfields, Standrums, Stortford Road (odds), Upper Mill Field, and Woodview Road.

On current figures there are 1934 electors within the proposed polling district.

Great Dunmow South-East: the remainder of Great Dunmow South ward not included within the Great Dunmow South-West polling district.

On current figures there are 1736 electors within the proposed polling district.

- 50 When these arrangements were discussed at the time of the 2002 review, consideration was given to dividing the ward into two polling districts north and south of a line drawn along the dismantled railway line and the southern bypass, with electors in the south of the town voting at Grove Court residential home in Nursery rise. In the event, Members rejected this option.
- 51 If Members are minded to adopt these proposals now, a further option might be to retain the Dourdan Pavilion for electors in the proposed North-East PD, retain the Foakes Hall for those electors in South-East (thus making no change of arrangements for any of those electors), and to designate either the United Reform Church in New Street, or the Day Centre as the PP for South-West. The URC was used successfully for a by-election in 2004 and is considered to be suitable for future use. It is reported as being fully accessible having been upgraded in the meantime.
- 52 On balance therefore, it is felt that both North and South divisions proposed in this report could be adopted now and the following buildings designated:
- North-West: Great Dunmow Primary School
 - North-East: Dourdan Pavilion
 - South-West: United Reform Church
 - South-East: E T Foakes Memorial Hall
- 53 This is felt to be the best available solution for the following reasons:

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- a) The South ward needs to be divided into two PDs now.
- b) The North ward will need to be divided soon, possibly before the next four-yearly review is due; making the change now will enable facilities to be designated that are convenient for electors in both parts of the ward.
- c) Each of the proposed designated polling places is located within the polling district to which they will be attached and is convenient for the majority of electors.
- d) Polling facilities will stay the same for 56% of electors; for most of the remainder, the new facility will be physically closer than the existing.

54 It is therefore **recommended that the proposed polling district boundaries set out in paragraphs 46 and 49, and the proposed polling places set out in paragraph 52 be adopted.**

55 There are no other proposals affecting polling districts in the East Panel area. It is therefore **recommended that the entire scheme covering the East Panel area be adopted, incorporating any revisions agreed at this meeting, with effect from the date of publication of the revised register on 30 November 2007, and that the electoral services officer be authorised to prepare a suitable statement of reasons for decisions made as part of the review.**

North Area Panel

56 There are no draft proposals for change affecting the North Panel area. However, the Returning Officer has commented on aspects of the existing scheme relating to **Saffron Walden Shire ward** and **Wimbish and Debden ward** and those comments are discussed below.

57 No comments have been made concerning any of the polling districts and places for the wards of **Ashdon, Littlebury, Newport, Saffron Walden Audley, Saffron Walden Castle, The Chesterfords, The Sampfords, and Wenden Lofts** as the existing arrangements are considered satisfactory. Members may wish however, to take into account the comments made about Ashdon, Duddenhoe End, Elmdon, and Newport village halls in paragraph 17 of this report. It should also be noted that Wendens Ambo Parish Hall was completely rebuilt earlier this year and is now fully accessible. In May this year, as a temporary measure, polling took place in the cricket pavilion while work was in progress.

58 The Returning Officer states that he has no suggestions to make regarding **Saffron Walden Shire ward** but feels there may be a future need to accommodate two polling stations within the designated polling place for Shire North (Four Acres Common Room). He says that, in his opinion, Four Acres is unsuited to housing a second polling station, both because it is relatively cramped for space and because there are no parking facilities at this location.

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- 59 Officers have long taken the view that the previous venue of the R A Butler School would offer a better polling facility for electors, but Members have always felt that schools should be designated only in instances where there is no realistic alternative. Please see also the RO's comments about the use of schools later in this report and the attached map showing the location of the various possible polling place venues in this polling district.
- 60 Because the difference in convenience to electors is perhaps marginal, this report does not advocate designating the R A Butler School instead of Four Acres but it is suggested the matter be considered. As the RO says, such a change may become necessary in due course.
- 61 As far as **Wimbish and Debden ward** is concerned, Members decided at the 2006 review to divide the parish of Wimbish into two separate PDs based on Carver Barracks and the Village. As the RO says, reports indicate that this arrangement worked well in May although turnout at Carver Barracks was very low. At least it can now be said that the special needs of service personnel and their families have been considered as part of the Council's polling scheme.
- 62 The RO refers in his response to the considerable efforts made in recent years to register more service personnel and there is no doubt that the number of electors at the Barracks has risen as a result. He also refers to plans to develop the site at Carver Barracks as stated in a letter from the Head of Land Management Services to the Senior Planning Officer in March this year. Quite reasonably, he makes the point that the continuance of a separate polling facility is dependant on the future use of the site. In the short to medium term there is little doubt that the existing arrangement should continue.
- 63 **It is recommended that the existing scheme for the whole of the area covered by the North Panel be recommended for adoption, incorporating any revisions made at this meeting, with effect from the publication of the revised register on 30 November 2007, and that the electoral services officer be authorised to prepare a suitable statement of reasons for the decisions made.**

South West Area Panel

- 64 There are no proposals or representations concerning the wards of **Broad Oak and the Hallingburys, Elsenham and Henham, Hatfield Heath, and Stort Valley**. Proposals affecting the remaining wards in the South West area are included in the following paragraphs.
- 65 The RO has commented on the development of some 600 residential units that has just commenced at Rochford Nurseries. Roughly two-thirds of the site is located in **Birchanger ward**. The remaining part of the development is in **Stansted South ward**. The following paragraphs go on to discuss polling arrangements in both that ward and in **Stansted North**.

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- 66 The RO's representations refer to the commitment, made some four years ago, for the Council to conduct a parish review to examine the boundary between Birchanger and Stansted once approximately 200 units are populated on the Rochford Nurseries site. He says that as significant numbers of electors are unlikely to be resident for some time to come, there is no present need to review polling arrangements.
- 67 He recommends that the matter of future provision at Rochford Nurseries is flagged up for future assessment at such time as the site is sufficiently developed to justify an interim review, and that any review of parish arrangements is taken into account at that time. Any interim review should assess the needs of the community on the new residential site, in relation to those electors in the village of Birchanger, and would take account of any new community facilities provided at Rochford Nurseries.
- 68 In the meantime, residents at the new site will vote at either Birchanger Church Hall, or at the polling place for Stansted South, depending on whichever parish they fall within.
- 69 All of the above comments apply equally to polling provision in **Stansted South**. The RO's representations refer also to existing polling facilities both there and in **Stansted North** (excluding Ugley parish) as well.
- 70 He says that, in his view, 'none of the polling locations in Stansted parish have been entirely satisfactory for some time'. He lists some of the locations used for polling in the past, such as the football club at Hargrave Park, the Mead Court common room, and the day centre at Crafton Green. Prior to the adoption of the new ward boundaries in 2003, the polling division in Stansted was organised on an east/west basis. Now that the division is north/south, it is the case that both polling venues are located physically within Stansted North, although the legal requirement is for the polling place to be within the district, in the absence of special circumstances.
- 71 That, in itself, is felt to be justifiable, as the Youth Centre is located within a very short distance of the PD boundary and is therefore convenient for the majority of electors. The RO does say it could be argued that the existing venues might be swapped around although this would actually make little difference.
- 72 However, it is now understood that Essex County Council intends eventually to dispose of the whole of the site incorporating both the Peter Kirk Centre and St Mary's Primary School for residential development. The school would be relocated to Rochford Nurseries and might then make a suitable venue for polling in Stansted South. The venue for Stansted North could then switch to the Youth Centre, or another suitable venue.
- 73 In existing circumstances, the RO recommends that the electoral services officer tries to identify another building in Stansted suitable for polling in Stansted North, or suggests to the Council that the entire Stansted North polling district be designated as the polling place, thus allowing the RO the

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flexibility to find the most suitable building at each election until the next review.

- 74 Although there is presently no need to make alternative polling provision in Stansted South, he suggests it might be helpful to adopt a similar approach there also. In practice, once circumstances alter sufficiently to justify an interim review, a further review will be arranged. However, if circumstances alter quickly, or the designated PP becomes unavailable there may not be time to arrange the review process.
- 75 The electoral services officer is not aware of another building that could serve as the designated PP for Stansted North, unless members wish to revert to using the Day Centre at Crafton Green. This would be suitable but the main reason the building was changed from there at a previous review was in response to requests from the day centre committee because of disruption to the daily routine of meal preparation.
- 76 Mead Court common room is not large enough to accommodate two stations and, in any case, the electors at Mead Court and Cannons Mead have to poll at the Youth Centre.
- 77 For all of these reasons, it is **recommended that the Peter Kirk Centre no longer be designated as the polling place for Stansted North polling district and that the whole polling district be designated as the polling place (unless Members wish to designate the day centre at Crafton Green instead); it is further recommended that Members consider the desirability of removing the Youth Centre in Lower Street and instead substituting the following description: an area covering the whole polling district, together with a radius of ¼ mile beyond the polling district boundary, subject to any building used being included within the built up part of Stansted village.**
- 78 Members will be aware of Essex County Council's stated intention to close Wicken House in the parish of **Wicken Bonhunt** and declare the building surplus to requirements. Wicken House is a residential study centre offering a range of learning programmes. The RO has commented that, in view of the uncertainty over the future of the building, it would be advisable to change the designation to the whole of the polling district. This will 'allow me discretion to continue to use Wicken House so long as it remains available, and to make whatever arrangements are possible after that time'.
- 79 Wicken Bonhunt is a small parish with no parish council or village hall. Before Wicken House was used for elections, polling in the village took place at a private residence. In the absence of Wicken House, it is not known what arrangements might prove possible. There is a public house (the Coach and Horses) but this is quite restricted for space and might not be suitable. The other options would be the use of either a private residence or a mobile unit.
- 80 The County Council's decision is being reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee but it is not of course possible to guess what the outcome of that process would be.

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- 81 In the circumstances, **it is recommended that Wicken House no longer be designated as the polling place in Wicken Bonhunt and that the whole of the polling district be designated instead.**
- 82 In **Takeley and the Canfields ward**, the draft proposals include a proposed change to the boundary between Mole Hill Green and Takeley polling districts. This is needed because the previous description included reference to geographical points that no longer exist. The amended boundary does not affect the arrangements for any existing electors.
- 83 The RO supports this proposal and questions the long-term viability of separate polling facilities at Mole Hill Green. However, that does not seem to be a matter for this review.
- 84 The proposed amended boundary for Mole Hill Green PD is **‘that portion of the parish of Takeley lying to the east and north of a line commencing on the north-western boundary of the parish at a point due north of the Passenger Terminal at Stansted Airport, and running in a southerly direction to a point on the road from Coopers End to Takeley village just to the north of Bridgefoot Cottages, then in a north-easterly direction to the parish boundary at the point where it is crossed by the byway known as Cobbs Lane’**. As before, Takeley will consist of that portion of the parish not included in the Mole Hill Green polling district.
- 85 **It is recommended that the arrangements set out in the previous paragraph be adopted.**
- 86 The RO’s comments include reference to the commencement of development at Priors Green. The site has planning consent for 637 dwellings. It is divided into phases that respect existing parish boundaries. The phases indicate that there will ultimately be 250 additional dwellings in Little Canfield and 387 in Takeley. The Little Canfield phases are scheduled for completion first and some units are already occupied.
- 87 It seems likely that development on this scale will gradually impact on polling arrangements in the two parishes. As the RO correctly points out, the Council is committed to a parish review once the site is fully occupied. The attached forecast suggests that the electorate will grow by more than 300 by mid 2011 and, by that stage, the population at Priors Green will have overtaken that in the remainder of Little Canfield.
- 88 The RO says that ‘I do not feel that the Council can take full account of the Priors Green development until it is considerably more advanced than at present, and until some community facilities are available’. Once that happens, in terms of polling facilities, it would clearly be more convenient for the residents at Priors Green to vote at a location on site, but that would not be possible unless parish boundaries were to alter. At this stage, it can only be suggested that polling arrangements in both Little Canfield and Takeley stay as they are, until and unless circumstances alter sufficiently to justify a further review. Arrangements in Great Canfield are unaffected.

- 89 There are no other proposals affecting polling districts in the South-West Panel area. It is therefore **recommended that the entire scheme covering the South-West Panel area be adopted, incorporating any revisions agreed at this meeting, with effect from the date of the publication of the revised register on 30 November 2007, and that the electoral services officer be authorised to prepare a suitable statement of reasons for decisions made as part of this review.**

Consequential changes arising from Parish Reviews

- 90 One further matter is unavoidable and must now be addressed. The Council conducted a parish review in 2001/02 proposing changes to a number of parish boundaries and the creation of a new parish at Swards End. The Council's parish review report requested a number of consequential changes to electoral boundaries to ensure that the changes harmonised with ward and county divisional boundaries. Regrettably, no consequential changes order has ever been made.
- 91 The result is that ward and divisional boundaries remain as they were defined before the parishes order was made and there is a consequent discrepancy between some electoral boundaries. Therefore in those instances, the Council must make separate arrangements for the electors concerned, for district ward elections and county divisional elections only.
- 92 The relevant areas affected by this muddle are listed below:
- ACA/2 – a number of electors at Stoney Common transferred from Birchanger to Stansted parish will continue to poll at St Mary's Church Hall, Birchanger for district ward elections only.
 - ACA/3 – a number of electors at Start Hill transferred from Birchanger to Great Hallingbury parish will continue to poll at St Mary's Church Hall, Birchanger for district ward and county divisional elections only.
 - ADC/2 – a number of electors at The Street transferred from Hatfield Broad Oak to Takeley parish will continue to poll at The Ancient Foresters, Bush End for district ward elections only.
 - ARA/2 – one elector at Thremhall Priory transferred from Stansted to Great Hallingbury parish will continue to poll at Stansted Youth Centre for district ward and county divisional elections only.
 - AWB/2 – a few electors at Little Walden transferred from Little Chesterford to Saffron Walden parish will continue to poll at Little Chesterford Village Hall for district ward elections only.
- 93 Members are asked to agree the arrangements listed above and **it is recommended accordingly**. The first four instances apply to the South-West Area Panel and the final instance applies to the North Area Panel.

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- 94 This situation is clearly unsatisfactory and confusing for those electors concerned and the electoral services officer will continue to press The Electoral Commission for an early solution.

General Comments by the Returning Officer

- 95 In his concluding remarks, the RO makes some general comments affecting all area panels. The first of these concerns the quality and training of polling staff. The second concerns the past reluctance of Members to designate school premises for polling use. Members will have the opportunity to read these remarks in full, in the document attached, but it will be helpful if all area panels are able to endorse the sentiment expressed that the law requires the Council to make the convenience of electors the primary consideration in conducting a review of polling arrangements, and this may sometimes lead to the designation of school premises, especially where there is no suitable alternative.
- 96 It is **recommended that the RO's remarks are endorsed by each area panel as a general statement of principle.**

Electorate projections

- 97 Although it is not a requirement to take electorate projections into account, it seems sensible to do so and, for this purpose, appendix 4 sets out the total number of expected electors as at mid 2011 when the next review will be due. There is an element of guesswork involved in producing these figures. Members should refer to the footnotes to the table for some explanation.
- 98 It will be for Members to decide how much weight they give these figures but clearly, the developments at Flitch Green, Woodlands Park, Priors Green, and Rochford Nurseries will all impact on current arrangements at some stage. Aside from the polling districts affected by these settlements, it seems that only Great Dunmow South (see comments elsewhere in this report) is likely to be unduly affected by significant electorate growth within the timeframe of this review.

Appendices:

Members are invited to refer to the following appendices for further background information to those matters discussed in the report:

Appendix 1: Public Notice of Polling District Review

Appendix 2: Draft proposed changes to the existing scheme

Appendix 3: Schedule of Polling District arrangements effective from 1 December 2006

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- Appendix 4: Four year electorate projections
- Appendix 5: Summary of Essex Disabled People's Association survey
- Appendix 6: Representations of the Returning Officer dated 5 September 2007
- Appendix 7: Representations of the Uttlesford Access Group
- Appendix 8: Map showing the proposed boundary between Flitch Green and Little Dunmow
- Appendix 9: Map showing the location of Flitch Green Primary School
- Appendix 10: Map showing the proposed boundary between Great Dunmow North-West and Great Dunmow North-East, and polling district locations
- Appendix 11: Map showing the proposed division between Great Dunmow South-West and Great Dunmow South-East, and potential polling district locations
- Appendix 12: Map showing the location of the URC, New Street, Dunmow
- Appendix 13: Map showing the location of the Day Centre, Chequers Lane, Dunmow
- Appendix 14: Map showing existing and potential locations for Saffron Walden Shire North polling district
- Appendix 15: Map showing the division between Stansted North and South wards and existing and potential polling places
- Appendix 16: Map showing the division between Birchanger and Stansted South wards and the location of the Rochford Nurseries site
- Appendix 17: Map showing the location of Wicken House, Wicken Bonhunt
- Appendix 18: Map showing the location of the Priors Green site straddling Little Canfield and Takeley polling districts

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Not complying with statutory duty to give electors such reasonable facilities as are practicable.	Unlikely because this is a statutory process with full consultation.	Potentially serious.	Follow statutory review framework and timescales.