



## Public Document Pack

# Uttlesford District Council

Chief Executive: Peter Holt

## Audit and Standards Committee

**Date:** Tuesday, 28th November, 2023

**Time:** 7.00 pm

**Venue:** Council Chamber - Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden,  
CB11 4ER

**Chairman:** Councillor E Oliver

**Members:** Councillors H Asker, S Barker, G Driscoll, C Fiddy, M Foley (Vice-Chair), N Gregory, T Loveday, S Luck, D McBirnie and R Silcock

**Substitutes:** Councillors A Dean, B Donald, C Martin and R Pavitt

**Independent Persons (Standards functions):** G Butcher, D Paul, D Pearl and C Wellingbrook-Doswell

### Public Speaking

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# **AGENDA**

## **PART 1**

### **Open to Public and Press**

- 1 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest**  
To receive any apologies for absence and declarations of interest.
- 2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting** 4 - 8  
To consider the minutes of the previous meeting.
- 3 Internal Audit Interim Report (November 2023) and Audit Plan (December 2023 - March 2024)** 9 - 17  
To consider the Internal Audit Interim Report and Audit Plan.
- 4 Polling Districts and Places Review 2023/4** 18 - 30  
To consider the revised Scheme of Polling District and Polling Places for the North West Essex Parliamentary Constituency.
- 5 Interim Review – Community Governance of Parishes** 31 - 35  
To consider the Interim Community Governance Review of four Parish Council boundaries.
- 6 Data Breaches and Direct Debits** 36 - 40  
To consider an overview of three recent data breaches and the 1 November Direct Debit issue.

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# Agenda Item 2 Public Document Pack

**AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2023 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor E Oliver (Chair)  
Councillors S Barker, C Fiddy, M Foley, T Loveday, S Luck and R Silcock.

Independent Persons: G Butcher, D Pearl and C Wellingbrook-Doswell.

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Director of Corporate Services), C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer), P Holt (Chief Executive) and A Webb (Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services).

Also in Attendance: D Gibbs and J Gudhuva (KPMG External Auditors).

## AS7 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Asker, Driscoll, Gregory and McBirnie.

There were no declarations of interest.

## AS8 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023 were approved as an accurate record with one amendment to add in Councillor Dean as an attendee.

## AS9 **CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS SUMMARY**

The Director of Corporate Services gave a brief overview of the complaints summary and made the following comments:-

- The committee would receive regular updates on code of conduct complaints that had been dealt with.
- The new Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer, Nurainatta Katevu, was starting on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> October.
- Interviews were taking place on Friday 29 September 2023 to recruit additional independent persons. There was currently a resilience issue when complaints were taken to a panel, as more than three independent persons would be required to ensure that all roles were covered.
- The date on item 2 in the appendix was incorrect; it should be 15/08/22.

Georgina Butcher thanked the Director of Corporate Services for having taken on the role of Monitoring Officer and said that they had enjoyed working with him and that he had got things done.

The Chair said that it was important that Members of the Audit and Standards Committee completed the necessary training as not all Councillors had to date. Georgina Butcher agreed and said that if a complaint went as far as a Panel hearing there would need to be 3 Councillors in attendance and they would all have to be trained.

The report was noted.

## AS10 **PREVIOUS AND CURRENT CODE OF CONDUCT COMPARISON**

The Chair said that this report had been requested at the previous meeting. The main differences were set out in paragraph 10.

The Director of Corporate Services said that the decision to adopt the model code of conduct had been taken by Full Council. He said it was the gold standard produced by the Local Government Association and provided more protection for Councillors.

Councillor Barker requested that it was circulated to all Councillors.

The report was noted.

## AS11 **INTERNAL AUDIT: STANDARDS COMPLAINTS PROCESSES**

The Director of Corporate Services said that this item had been added in full due to the length of time it had taken in the past to consider complaints. He made the following points:-

- The Internal Audit Manager had been asked to look at processes within the complaints procedures and all recommendations had been acted upon.
- He would speak to the new Head of Legal to make sure that she was aware of the issues.
- The main change in the process would be how any new complaints were triaged so that they were dealt with quickly and further investigation was only carried out on those breaches that may be proven and that represented value for money given the likely outcome.

Catherine Wellingbrook-Doswell said that there needed to be caution when considering cost, it could be easier not to continue with a breach but it was important to get across to Councillors how they should behave in public life. She said it was a balancing act.

Councillor Barker welcomed the new procedures and said those complaints that had no grounds to go forward should be shut down quickly.

David Pearl said that:-

- The Monitoring Officer needed to look at procedures as they did not quite fit with the new code of conduct.
- For consistency the parishes should be in the same scheme.
- Once a complaint was received it should be immediately sent to the Councillor concerned for their comments. This was not currently in the procedures.

The Director of Corporate Services said that he would raise these concerns with the Monitoring Officer when she started with Uttlesford District Council (UDC).

The report was noted.

*The Director of Corporate Services and the Independent Panel Members left the meeting at 7.20pm.*

## AS12 **POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES REVIEW 2023/4**

The Electoral Services Manager made the following comments about the report:

- A formal review had to take place by law every 5 years.
- It looked at the suitability of venues to be polling places in terms of many factors including ease of access for all electors.
- There was a boundary review taking place which would change the name of the constituency from Saffron Walden to North West Essex.
- There were also a small number of changes to some boundaries proposed, but these did not affect the electorate, they remained as Uttlesford residents but were represented by a different Member of Parliament.
- The priority venue to find an alternative polling place was for voters who attended at the Homebase car park in a portacabin. The venue was no longer suitable. There was restricted space which, due to the requirements of voter identification and accessibility issues, was not ideal. An alternative polling place would be investigated.

The date on the recommendation should be December 2023 not 2024.

Councillor Barker said that the car parking in Takeley and Dunmow North was not ideal.

The Electoral Services Manager clarified that the grey colouring represented a double polling station and the green was where there were two different polling districts within the same polling station.

The Chair said to send comments to the Electoral Services Manager on any proposals and comments on existing provision.

RESOLVED: that approval be given to the (Acting) Returning Officer to conduct a review in accordance with the timetable for a revised Scheme of Polling district and Polling places for the North West Essex Parliamentary Constituency within Uttlesford district with effect from December 2023.

**AS13 INTERIM REVIEW: COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE OF PARISHES**

The Chair said that there were four parishes affected by this report, Saffron Walden Town Council, Swards End, Great Chesterford and Little Chesterford. He said they had all been consulted and were in agreement.

In response to a question from Councillor Barker the Electoral Services Manager said that the recommendations would come back to the Audit and Standards Committee in November and should take effect from early spring 2024.

RESOLVED: To approve the terms of reference and timetable for an Interim Community Governance Review for the specific parish areas set out in the report and in Appendix 1.

**AS14 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN REPORT 2022/23**

The Chief Executive said that the annual review report from the Local Government Ombudsman had been received and summarised complaints for all Councils within the year. He said that there were two complaints upheld against UDC and these were set out in paragraph 10.

In both cases the Council had dealt with the complaints and they had been resolved and the lessons learnt used to update policies.

He gave an update on the second complaint regarding the electrical substation. Since Members had approved financial provision in order to resolve the issue, the developer had indicated that they were now minded to make that financial provision themselves. He said that for the residents it would mean the work would be completed either way.

The Chief Executive said that in paragraph 12 there was a comparison table of similar near neighbouring Councils which would be used going forward in other comparisons, as it considered Councils that shared many indicators and characteristics with UDC. The table showed that UDC were second from the bottom of the league table meaning they had fewer complaints than all but one other comparative Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Fiddy the Chief Executive said that he did not think an internal audit of planning conditions was on the current 2 year audit plan, he would check and let her know. He said he would investigate adding it to the audit plan for the future if it was not.

In response to a question from Councillor Barker, the external auditors confirmed that they had carried out due diligence relating to any potential conflicts of interest and said that if anyone knew of any relationships that might need to be raised to please contact them.

The Chief Executive said that going forward it would be prudent to prompt all Members to look at their register of interests when any new contract was entered into.

*Meeting ended at 7.50pm.*



# Agenda Item 3

**Committee:** Audit and Standards Committee

**Date:** Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup>  
November 2023

**Title:** Internal Audit Interim Report (November 2023)  
and Audit Plan (December 2023 - March 2024)

**Report Author:** Philip Honeybone, Internal Audit Manager  
phoneybone@uttlesford.gov.uk

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## Summary

1. This report extends the Internal Audit Annual Plan that was presented to the Audit and Standards Committee in June 2023 to the end of the Financial Year. It also summarises the work that Internal Audit has undertaken during the financial year 2023/24 to date and provides details on the high risk and priority issues identified in the year to date which could impact on the effectiveness of the internal control environment, risk management and governance arrangements across the Council.

## Recommendations

2. Audit and Standards Committee are requested to note the content of this report.

## Financial Implications

3. None

## Background Papers

4. The paper references the Internal Audit Annual Plan 2023-24 presented to Audit and Standards Committee in June 2023

## Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	This report was sent to CMT in November 2023.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	None

Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

## Situation

6. The provision of a continuous internal audit service assists the Council in providing assurance on the control environment that supports the delivery of the Council's strategy.
7. The attached report summarises the work that Internal Audit has undertaken during the financial year 2023/24 to date and the planned audit work for the remainder of the financial year. The Internal Audit Manager post was vacant from June 2023 until the current post holder started on 30 October 2023. This has impacted on work completed in the year to date and has resulted in some audit work being deferred.
8. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) require that the Audit Manager provides an annual audit opinion and report that can be used by the organisation to inform its governance statement in respect of the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of internal control, risk management and governance. The plan will provide the evidence base for this opinion

## Risk Analysis

9.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Inadequate audit coverage may lead to failure to provide an annual opinion of the Council's governance, risk and control arrangements; reputational damage and failure to comply with PSIAS	2	2	Monitoring of plan delivery and reporting to CMT and GAP, contingency built into plan for additional days if required; Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

# Internal Audit Interim Report (November 2023) and Audit Plan (December 2023 – March 2024) – Audit and Standards Committee – 28/11/23

## 1. Purpose of Report

Audit and Standards Committee are requested to note the content of this report and approve the Internal Audit Plan for December 2023 – March 2024 prior to its submission to Audit and Standards Committee on 28 November 2023. The revised plan will produce the evidence base needed to support the Internal Audit annual report and opinion for the 2023/24 financial year. This report has been reviewed by CMT.

## 2. Background

The Council is responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate risk management processes, control systems, accounting records and governance arrangements. The purpose of UDC's Internal Audit section is to provide independent, objective assurance and consulting services to the Council (via the Audit and Standards Committee, Chief Executive, S151 Officer, External Audit and senior managers), relating to these arrangements, which are designed to add value and improve the Council's operations.

The Audit Manager is also responsible for the delivery of an annual audit opinion that can be used by the Council to inform its governance statement. The annual opinion will also conclude on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management and control.

In June 2023, the Audit and Standards Committee approved the audit plan for April – September 2023 and potential auditable areas for the rest of the year. The previous Audit Manager based this on a prioritisation of the audit universe using a risk-based methodology, including input from the Council's Corporate Plan, Corporate Risk Register, AGS Action Plan as well as discussions with Council staff, senior management, plus consideration of local and national issues and risks. She also suggested potential areas for audit in the second half of the financial year. The plan for the remainder of the financial year was to be agreed at a later date.

This document provides CMT with an updated plan for consideration and approval alongside an update on the audit work for the financial year to date. The paper will be put forward for approval by Audit and Standards Committee on 28th November 2023.

## 3. Internal Audit Plan and Resources

This report extends the 2023/24 plan for the full financial year. The Audit Manager assessed the work completed / underway in the year to date, held discussions with senior management and used the Corporate Risk Register<sup>1</sup> to sense-check audit priorities identified in the previous risk assessment. The main changes have been to include an audit of the governance arrangements for the Blueprint Uttlesford programme and the identification of Accounts Payable as the Key Financial System that will be reviewed.

The Audit Manager will be responsible for delivery of this plan and will ensure that the Internal Audit service has access to an appropriate range of knowledge, skills, qualifications and experience required to deliver it. The plan will be kept under review to ensure it remains responsive to the changing priorities and risks of the Council. In addition to planned work, Internal Audit can also provide ad hoc advice and guidance to management on risk and control issues within individual systems as requested.

Appendix A shows the proposed audit plan for the 2023/24 audit year. In addition to the proposed work programme for 2023/24 it captures 2022/23 audits that were in draft in June 2023 and shows the status of all items. Appendix B reconciles the current plan to that approved in June to provide transparency in the proposed amendments.

Internal Audit may also undertake work which does not contribute explicitly to the overall audit opinion and/or deliver an assurance statement. These may include certification of grant claims or consulting activities where Internal Audit provide independent and objective advice and guidance to management on risk and control issues within individual systems to improve those systems and processes where necessary.

Where such work is undertaken, this will be set out as part of Internal Audit's annual report. The Audit Manager will give due consideration to the appropriateness of undertaking such work to protect Internal Audit's independence and minimise the impact on the delivery of the overall plan.

The Audit Manager post was vacant from June - 30 October 2023. In addition, auditor time has been weighted towards follow-up work, which has been resource intensive and slowed progress on the 2023/24 audit plan. It is anticipated that audit delivery will now accelerate. Issues arising from the work to date are shown in paragraph 5 below.

#### **4. Follow-up audits**

Current processes are for all recommendations on each audit to be followed up after the final due date. It is often found that significant numbers of control weaknesses have not been addressed leading to repeated follow-ups. The follow-up process has been labour-intensive and has had implications for the delivery of the audit programme.

Appendix C shows the status of follow-up work on audits completed in 2022/23. Issues arising from the follow-up work to date are shown in paragraph 5 below.

The Audit Manager proposes transitioning to following up recommendations as they become due. This will ensure delays are identified at an earlier stage so that managers can be reminded of the need to address the issues. Reporting mechanisms and escalation procedures will be developed to inform senior managers are aware of the situation in their areas and help facilitate any necessary remedial action.

The Audit Manager also proposes a formal risk acceptance process where managers at an appropriate level can accept the risk of not implementing the recommendations. It is suggested that service leads can accept the risk associated with low priority recommendations, directors can accept the risk associated with medium priority recommendations, but high and critical priority recommendations require CMT approval.

#### **5. Key Issue arising (year to date)**

As part of the November Interim Report, CMT and Audit and Standards Committee receive details of critical/high priority issues raised in audit reviews. They will receive an update on these issues in annual report (June 2024). In addition, any significant emerging risks will be reported as they arise. The key issues arising from 2023/24 audit work are:

- Standards Complaints audit:
  - Two high priority recommendations have been made to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the way in which complaints are processed. Management agreed to implement all elements by December 2023. In October 2023, a new Monitoring Officer joined the Council. She is aware of the audit report and its recommendations.
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy follow-up
  - One high priority recommendation remained outstanding at the time of the follow-up regarding the oversight of performance management. This was initially agreed by the Interim Deputy Director of Housing, Health and Communities and has now been reassigned to the Director of Housing, Health and Communities with an extension. Internal Audit will obtain a further update before the end of the financial year.

## Appendix A - Internal Audit Draft Annual Plan 2023/24

It should be noted that the audit titles and high-level scopes included below are only indicative at this stage. At the start of each audit, an initial discussion will be held to agree the specific objective and scope of the review.

Audit Title	Link to Corporate Plan	Link to Corporate Risk	Indicative Scope	Current Status
Capital Expenditure	Putting Residents First	22-CR-01 Financial Control	Review of oversight of the capital programme and allocation of resources. 2022/23 audit at draft report in June 2023.	Moderate
Procurement and Contract Management	Putting Residents First	22-CR-01 Financial Control	Review of the Council's high value expenditure to provide assurance that Council procedures have been followed and contracts are managed effectively. 2022/23 audit at draft report in June 2023.	Draft Report
Page 13 Cyber Security		22-CR-05 Data Protection 22-CR-06 Information Technology	Review of the controls in place to mitigate risks surrounding IT security, including PSN and PCI requirements.	In Progress
Standards Complaints	Putting Residents First	22-CR-07 Governance	Review of the Council's compliant procedures, including complaints made against Councillors.	Limited
Corporate Property & Asset Management	Putting Residents First	22-CR-07 Governance	Review of the governance arrangements for Council's Corporate Property and Asset Management process, including maintenance of property records	In Progress
Temporary Accommodation	Building Strong Communities	22-CR-01 Financial Control	Review of the Council's arrangements for Temporary Accommodation, including procurement and monitoring of providers.	Planning
Housing Rents	Building Strong Communities	22-CR-01 Financial Control	To review the management of Council tenant's housing rents, including management of arrears	In Progress

Audit Title	Link to Corporate Plan	Link to Corporate Risk	Indicative Scope	Current Status
Blueprint Uttlesford	Putting Residents First	22-CR-01 Financial Control 22-CR-04 People 22-CR-12 Borrowing & Investments	Governance arrangements with a focus on reporting and monitoring arrangements.	
Accounts Payable	Putting Residents First	22-CR-01 Financial Control 22-CR-10 Fraud	Audit of one of the Authority's Key Financial Systems	
Consultancy/interim & agency contracts	Putting Residents First	22-CR-01 Financial Control		
Key Health and Safety Housing Landlord Duties	Building Strong Communities	22-CR-13 Contracts & Partnership Management	To provide the Council with assurance that assurance that Health and Safety inspections are carried out on timely basis. The audit will cover lifts, legionella, asbestos, electrical, gas, fire safety, fire alarms, carbon monoxide and damp / mould.	
Leisure PFI		22-CR-13 Contracts & Partnership Management	Strategic review of the PFI model for delivery of Leisure Services.	

## Appendix B – Reconciliation between June and November 2023 Audit Plans

<b>Internal Audit Plan (June 2023)</b>	<b>Internal Audit Plan (November 2023)</b>
<b>April to September 2023</b>	
<b>Cyber Security</b>	<b>In Progress</b>
<b>Standards Complaints</b>	<b>Complete</b>
<b>Corporate Risk Management</b>	<b>Deferred due to service review</b>
<b>Corporate Property and Asset Management</b>	<b>In Progress</b>
<b>Temporary Accommodation</b>	<b>Planning</b>
<b>Housing Rents</b>	<b>In Progress</b>
<b>Saffron Walden Museum</b>	<b>Deferred due to service review</b>
<b>Proposed Audit Areas (October 2023 to March 2024)</b>	
<b>Financial Management Code</b>	<b>Deferred due to insufficient resource</b>
<b>Budgetary Control</b>	<b>Deferred due to insufficient resource</b>
<b>Key Financial Systems</b>	<b>Retained in plan as Accounts Payable audit</b>
<b>Consultancy/interim &amp; agency contracts</b>	<b>Retained in plan</b>
<b>Uttlesford Norse Governance Arrangements</b>	<b>Retained in plan</b>
<b>Housing Standards – Voids / Empty Homes</b>	<b>Deferred due to insufficient resource</b>
<b>Right to Buy</b>	<b>Deferred due to insufficient resource</b>
<b>Equality Impact Assessments</b>	<b>Deferred due to insufficient resource</b>
<b>Uttlesford Futures</b>	<b>Deferred due to insufficient resource</b>
<b>Air Quality Grant</b>	<b>Deferred due to insufficient resource</b>
<b>Environmental Health including Enforcement and Permits</b>	<b>Deferred due to insufficient resource</b>
<b>Leisure PFI</b>	<b>Retained in Plan</b>
<b>Governance and Decision Making</b>	<b>Deferred due to insufficient resource</b>
<b>Members Allowances and Expenses</b>	<b>Deferred due to insufficient resource</b>

## Appendix C – Follow-up of Audits Completed in 2022/23

<b>Audit</b>	<b>Original Opinion</b>	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>Revised Opinion (Indicative)</b>
Uttlesford Norse	<b>No Assurance</b>	Full audit planned for 2023/24	
Safeguarding	<b>Moderate</b>	Delayed until Dec 23 due to change in management	
Planning Applications	<b>Moderate</b>	Overdue	
CCTV / RIPA	<b>Limited</b>	In Progress	
Income Generating Waste	<b>Moderate</b>	In Progress	
Climate Change	<b>Moderate</b>	Complete	<b>Moderate</b>
Business Continuity and Emergency Planning	<b>Moderate</b>	Complete	<b>Moderate</b>
Economic Development	<b>Substantial</b>	N/A	<b>Substantial</b>
Licensing	<b>Substantial</b>	Due Mar 24	
Grants Received	<b>Substantial</b>	N/A	<b>Substantial</b>
Corporate Health & Safety Governance	<b>Moderate</b>	Complete	<b>Moderate</b>
HR Payroll	<b>Substantial</b>	Due Mar 24	
Housing Allocation	<b>Substantial</b>	N/A	<b>Substantial</b>
Planning Applications	<b>Moderate</b>	In Progress	
Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy	<b>Moderate</b>	Complete	<b>Moderate</b>



<b>Audit</b>	<b>Original Opinion</b>	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>Revised Opinion (Indicative)</b>
<b>Follow-up of pre 2022/23 audits with outstanding recommendations</b>			
<b>Section 106 Obligations</b>	<b>Limited</b>	<b>Complete</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<b>Information Governance</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Draft</b>	
<b>Domestic Waste &amp; Recycling</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>In Progress</b>	
<b>Officer and Member Conflicts of Interest</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>In Progress</b>	
<b>Leasehold Service Charges</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Follow-up completed in 2022/23. No action required in 2023/24.</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<b>Information Governance</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>In Progress</b>	
<b>Domestic Waste and Recycling</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>In Progress</b>	
<b>KFS 2021/22 (Cash Management)</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Overdue</b>	

# Agenda Item 4

**Committee:** Audit and Standards Committee

**Date:** 28<sup>th</sup>  
November 2023

**Title:** Polling District and Polling Places Review  
2023

**Author:** Philip Hardy, Electoral Services Manager

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## Summary

1. The Electoral Registration and Administrations Act 2013 places a statutory responsibility on Councils, via the (Acting) Returning Officer, to carry out a UK Parliamentary polling district and polling places review every 5 years. This compulsory review must be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
2. The adjoining councils of Braintree, Chelmsford and Harlow are also in the process of conducting a similar review exercise of its polling district and places; this includes the electoral areas within Chelmsford City Council's administrative boundary that lies in the North West Essex (formerly Saffron Walden) Parliamentary Constituency.
3. Harlow and Braintree District Councils' (Acting) Returning Officer for their respective Parliamentary Constituencies will have responsibility for two electoral areas (wards) – two each following the recent Parliamentary Boundary Review that also changed the name of the Saffron Walden Constituency. For completeness, this Council's (Acting) Returning Officer has reviewed those areas and will convey this to those two councils. Feedback has also been received from the (Acting) Returning Officer for Harlow regarding the polling places that will come its constituency.

## Recommendations

4. That approval be given to the (Acting) Returning Officer's recommendations for a revised Scheme of Polling District and Polling Places for the North West Essex Parliamentary Constituency and for changes to other Polling District and Places within the district, as from 1 December 2023, as set out in paragraph 24 of the report and in Appendix 2.

## Financial Implications

5. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any recommendations for change have been based on what is considered to offer voters the best experience; it may be that venue hire costs vary marginally to those venues currently used but, in all cases, other than for district council elections, the costs can be recovered.

## Background Papers

6. All papers referred to by the author in the preparation of this report are already published and are widely available, including the Electoral Commission's guidance.

## Impact

7.

Communication/Consultation	Full public consultation has been carried out as part of the statutory review process
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	There is a requirement to take account of the need for full accessibility in the buildings selected for polling and organisations that represent individuals with a wide range of needs have been consulted.
Health and Safety	The consideration of health and safety issues is included in the review process.
Human Rights/Legal Implications	Rules set out in legislation must be followed in designating polling arrangements.
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	N/A
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

## Situation

8. By law the council is required to review UK Parliamentary polling districts and places every five years. The last full review exercise was carried out in 2018. The council can review only those parts of the North West Essex Parliamentary constituency included within the Uttlesford district and the same polling arrangements are then used for all other elections such as for Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, county, district, parish and all referendums. However, for completeness the four wards that will come under Braintree and Harlow parliamentary constituencies respectively have been reviewed on behalf of those two councils and have incorporated their (A)RO's feedback.

A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a parliamentary constituency. In England, each parish must be a separate polling district but where the parish includes more than one ward (or parish

ward) the polling district must not cross the ward boundary. For reasons of practicality, it is sensible to ensure that a single polling district does not include more than 3,000 electors and in accordance with the Electoral Commission's guidance no one polling station should have more than 2,250 electors allocated to it, this is net of absent voters on polling day.

9. A polling place is the building or area within each polling district in which polling stations will be located by the (Acting) Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district (small enough to be readily identified), must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district. The polling station is the room within the building (polling place) where the actual voting takes place and designation of the station is for the (Acting) Returning Officer.
10. The duty to designate polling places means considering the convenience of electors living in the area and to ensure compliance, as far as is practicable, with the accessibility needs of disabled electors.
11. As delegated by full council, this committee has been authorised to consider these recommendations and approve any amendments.
12. At its meeting of 28 September 2023, the Audit and Standards Committee approved the timetable for this review.
13. Bearing in mind that the (Acting) Returning Officer in essence carries out a mini review at each poll about the polling place on its continued practicality and suitability, this review exercise has been light touch, aimed at highlighting specific concerns. This is also appropriate, given the limitations on options for changes especially in venues that can be made available across the council's large geographical area, which predominantly rural. There are very limited alternatives (if any) for a polling place in many areas.
14. The (Acting) Returning Officer has made no recommendations for change to existing polling districts – each one is a separate register of electors. However, bearing in mind the level of house building in parts of the district, there may well be the need for the splitting and creation of new polling districts at the next statutory review in five years' time.
15. The (Acting) Returning Officer was keen, as part of this review, to consider reasonable alternatives to the use of schools as polling places where possible. This council has a very small proportion of its polling place as schools, with just four venues. The (Acting) Returning Officer is allowed by law to select schools as polling places and this includes all mainstream schools, including academies. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 imposed a duty on (Acting) Returning Officers to review their choice of polling stations at least every four years, but they may also do so more frequently. This council has moved away from a number of schools. Bentfield primary school, Stansted and Great Sampford primary school being two specific examples which were previously in the council's approved polling scheme.

16. Schools are often in the most suitable area for the majority of the local electorate to easily reach. The school cannot charge for hire, just request payment for additional heating, lighting, and caretaking fees either side of the normal school day. The (Acting) Returning Officer must consider if there are other suitable premises nearby that can be booked for hire thus avoid any disruption to the school day, however, many schools use polling day as a teacher training day. With the rise in frequency of unscheduled elections/referendums, it can be very difficult for the staff to manage the impact on the education of children, particularly when the school must close as the only effective measure to manage the safeguarding risks. In addition, considerable inconvenience can be caused to parents and carers.
17. There are no proposals to increase the use of schools for polling, however an approach was made to use a private school in Saffron Walden - The Dame Bradbury Junior School as this is in the catchment area of APA Castle East polling district that currently votes at a mobile polling place/station placed on Homebase car park and is no longer considered appropriate.
18. Because of unscheduled elections, alternative arrangements to schools and other polling places have had to be made due to unavailability and this has provided the opportunity to assess the suitability of other venues, not previously used.
19. Public consultation with stakeholders, parish councils, local members, political parties, charities, and other interested bodies took place between 2 October and 13 November. During this period a number of comments and observations were received.
20. All the representations received have been examined and a final set of proposals for designated polling stations has been prepared as the Acting Returning Officer's draft recommendations.
21. Public notice of these draft recommendations has been placed on the Council's website, following the close of the consultation period on 13 November.
22. Details of the consultees are set out in **Appendix 1** and the consultation comments are set out under paragraph 24 below. The proposed revised scheme for polling districts for North West Essex Parliamentary Constituency and the district as a whole, is set out at **Appendix 2**, and is for approval.

## Risk Analysis

23.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
There is a risk that existing polling arrangements will	2 – It is necessary to review polling arrangements	3 – If changes are not put in place there is a danger of	Carry out a review of those areas where concerns are known to exist so that all

not meet the needs and expectations of the public	in some areas as specified in the report to prevent them proving inadequate at future elections	confusion leading to reduced turnout at future elections	interested parties including the general public have an opportunity to suggest suitable polling arrangements
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1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

## 24. Consultation Reponses

### **ABD - Hatfield Broad Oak**

The Acting Returning Officer and Chief Executive from Harlow Council, where this polling district would come under from the next Parliamentary General Election, has made the following comments about the St John Evangelist Church i.e. the current polling place:

*The Church is lacking in space (the station has to be set up in the church pews); facilities (lack of heating and only a kettle for the staff to use); also disabled access is not completely adequate with an uneven gravel path that is not lit up at night.*

*As there seems to be no other alternative options in the polling district of which we are currently aware, consideration could be given to using Hatfield Broad Oak Village Hall, either as 2 polling stations in the one place or combine the two current polling districts into one. The church is not in the main part of Bush End and the properties in this rural area are spread out so I expect most electors attending the station would drive. Therefore, it is suggested that electors would be happy to drive to the village hall in Hatfield Broad Oak. There are only 105 electors in Bush End and so there is ample space in the village hall to accommodate a small increase in the electorate or set up another polling station in the hall for these electors. Hatfield Broad Oak Village Hall has better facilities and disabled access.*

### **Uttlesford (A)RO comments:**

Electors at the adjoining polling district (ABC) vote at the Hatfield Broad Oak village hall which, as of 1 August had just 876 electors, and this venue is large enough and has suitable facilities that could easily accommodate voters for the whole of Hatfield Broad Oak parish.

I agree with the comments made by the ARO at Harlow. The one polling station could accommodate voters from both polling districts. The only time

that separate provision would need to be made would be for a Parish election like in May 2023, when just one of the parish wards was contested, but this could be accommodated by splitting the polling place in to two stations for that poll.

**Recommendation:**

That voters from polling district ABD Bush End vote forthwith at the Hatfield Broad Oak Village Hall and use of the church be discontinued.

**AHB – Great Dunmow North West**

Great Dunmow primary school is the polling place for the 2,000 voters of north west of the parish. As mentioned above school sites are generally in convenient locations for voters as this school is but it is not ideal as the school likes to stay open. Parking is very limited; it is on a bank and the school themselves request security fencing to enable clear segregation of voters and pupils to enhance safeguarding. At the elections in May a complaint was received about the lack of disabled parking as someone had to park much further away than they would have liked.

**Uttlesford (A)RO comments:**

Ideally the (Acting) Returning Officer would like to move to a different venue with better access and parking, however there is currently no such venues in the polling district.

No comments were made during the consultation period. Consequently, in the absence of an alternative venue being available, it is recommended to stay at the school site, however, the school be requested to consider closing especially at a parliamentary general election due to the number of voters.

**Recommendation:**

That the Great Dunmow Primary School continue to be the allocated polling place for polling district AHB, however the school be approached to recommend that they close on polling day and specifically at a parliamentary general election.

**APA – Castle East**

A temporary polling station is used in this polling district, this being a portacabin placed on Homebase car park for the 1,640 electorate.

A portacabin is not at all ideal as space for voters and polling staff is very limited. The number of electors allocated to the venue means that a minimum of 2 poll clerks should be appointed in addition to the presiding officer. Ideally 3 poll clerks should be allocated in accordance with the Electoral Commission's revised staffing ratios due to measures under the Elections Act 2022. However, there is insufficient room to have 4 staff and limited space for

the staff to sort their paperwork. There is also no area for any voter to show their identification document in private should they so request.

Disability access is not great even with a ramp provided; this requires a handrail due to its length. The staff must use the toilet facilities at Homebase where an electric cable is linked for heating and lighting. Though not a main consideration, such venues are also very expensive costing well over £1,000 where the average cost of polling stations across the district is nearer £300.

#### **Uttlesford (A)RO comments:**

Due to the comments on general unsuitability of using portacabins on health, safety, welfare, space and cost grounds, the A(RO) wishes to move to a permanent venue, ideally within the polling district.

The Community Hospital was considered but there are no such buildings within the site suitable to hire.

A venue that has been used in the past is the Dame Bradbury's Junior School. This school like the hospital is in the polling district. This is an independent school, and the A(RO) does not have the power to use such a school as a right. The school was last used in 2015 and was going to be used at the Police and Crime Commissioner election in May 2016 but they withdrew their support four months before polling day. I have no details of why the governors withdrew support. In the absence of anywhere else suitable voters were allocated to this mobile venue on Homebase car park.

The school has been approached and are still to respond.

The Saffron Walden Town Council has suggested that voters could be allocated to the Town Hall. We already use this as a polling place for AOA Audley North with voters attending the Committee Room as the polling station. The Town Council would make the Council Chamber available for the APA electorate thus segregating voters. The venue is big enough to do this. Both rooms are large enough and fully accessible for voters.

We have had no adverse feedback from local members about this suggestion, just positive comments such as from Castle Ward district councillor Freeman:

*I agree that the Homebase arrangement is less than ideal. The Town Hall certainly can accommodate a second polling station (we usually have one for Shire Ward in the lower rooms at the back, with an entrance opposite Starbucks). The Castle Polling Station could, for example, be the Court Room; or the remaining room opposite the Shire Ward station.*

*The arrangement using the church in Castle Street works well. It used to be the school, further up the street, but that involved the school being closed for the day – which is absurd. This is probably the reason for the reluctance of the former Dame Bradbury's School in Ashdon Road to host a polling station.*



*Schools nowadays have very strict safeguarding arrangements and opening them to the public causes all sorts of extra work for the staff.*

Saffron Walden Shire Ward district councillor McBirnie commented that:

*Saffron Walden Town Hall makes sense rather than the Homebase portable site.*

As with all changes we shall monitor feedback at future elections.

The voters would vote out of their ward; however, it is still within the Town Council area, only one mile from the electorate that would attend the Homebase car park venue and in the town centre. This is allowed in the Regulations. The electorate would have a much better voter experience and there would be improved health, safety, and welfare for the (A)RO's staff.

**Recommendation:**

That Saffron Walden Town Hall be the preferred polling place for the APA Castle East electors. Electors to be allocated a different room as a polling station to the AOA Audley North electorate.

**Other comments received:**

**Great Canfield Parish Council**

Great Canfield parish council confirms it has no comments to make on existing arrangements other than they are satisfactory.

**Uttlesford A(RO)'s comment:**

Polling is at the Great canfield Church Hall on Marsh Lane and is considered suitable.

**Saffron Walden Town Council**

**APA – Mobile Unit at Homebase**

SWTC feels this is an inadequate location and poorly accessible for residents.

Alternative buildings could be Dame Bradburys school, Town Hall (whilst out of Ward it is an existing station), the Church, Lime Avenue changing facilities.

Comments from local councillors R Freeman and D McBirnie are included within the body of the report.

**Uttlesford A(RO)'s comment:**

These suggestions have been explored. Dame Bradbury's school approached, and the Town Hall recommended.

### **Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council**

Members agreed that that the Parish Council has no comments to make on the review.

### **Uttlesford A(RO)'s comment:**

Polling provision is improved since using the Mountfitchet Exchange venue which is proposed to be formally endorsed as part of the revised polling scheme.

### **Hearing Help Essex**

Though received just prior to the formal review commencing, the (A)RO had very useful comments from this local organisation provided help and assistance for people with hearing difficulties.

*I would ask you to consider space available in polling stations – many of your residents wear hearing aids so being able to have a clear conversation with the Officer when there are other conversations happening at the same time can be very difficult. Having a bit of a quieter space to one side could be really helpful to the 1 in 5 Uttlesford residents who experience hearing loss.*

*Also having any instructions clearly available for view – e.g. laminated cards with what the officers would say etc will aid communication too. As many of your residents will also have eye deterioration too, I would recommend these are typed in minimum font 16, but I am sure your local sight-loss charity will advise on this.*

### **Uttlesford (A)RO comments:**

This suggestion is warmly welcomed and can be easily and cheaply introduced for all stations for all polls going forward.

**APPENDIX 1**

**Consultees**

Key stakeholders were invited to comment on the review, these being local political parties and elected members/officials at different levels of representation, including the following:

MP for the North West Essex Parliamentary Constituency, the Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP

Acting Returning Officer for Braintree, Chelmsford (see note 1 below) and Harlow Parliamentary Constituencies

Essex County Council

District Councillors

Town and Parish Clerks

Main contacts for local political parties – The Conservative Party, Green Party, The Labour Party, Liberal Democrats and Residents for Uttlesford

The following disability groups were also contacted:

Age UK Essex
Alzheimer’s Society
Citizens Advice
UCAN formally CVSU
Carers First
Home-Start Essex (Uttlesford)
League of Friends Saffron Walden Community Hospital
Lioness Club
Mind in West Essex
Royal British Legion
Saffron Walden Dementia Alliance
Saffron Walden Mencap
Outreach Project
St Claires Hospice
Support 4 Sight
Thaxted Centre for the Disabled
Uttlesford Community Travel
Uttlesford Frontline
Hearing Help

**Note 1** – Chelmsford is currently carrying out its review of its polling provision which may lead to a change of a polling place within this part of the North West Essex constituency, though currently none are indicated.

## Appendix 2

Station No. May 2023	Polling District Ref	Polling District Description	Existing Polling Place (Station - if identified as separate)	Parish	Ward	Constituency (see note 1 below)	Elector Count @01/08/23	% Turnout at May 23 local elections	(Acting) Returning Officer Recommendations
1	AAA	Ashdon	Ashdon Village Hall, Radwinter Road, Ashdon, CB10 2HA	Ashdon	Ashdon	North West Essex	706	31.26	
2	AAB	Hadstock	Hadstock Village Hall, Church Lane, Hadstock, CB21 4PH	Hadstock	Ashdon	North West Essex	286	39.26	
3	AAC	Little Walden	Little Walden Village Hall, Little Walden, Saffron Walden, CB10 1XA	Saffron Walden - Castle & Little Walden Ward	Ashdon	North West Essex	185	47.02	
4	AAD	Sewards End	Sewards End Village Hall, Radwinter Road, Sewards End, CB10 2LR	Sewards End	Ashdon	North West Essex	427	44.35	
5	ABA	Great Canfield	Great Canfield Church Hall, Marsh Lane, Great Canfield, CM6 1JX	Great Canfield	Broad Oak & The Hallingburys	Harlow	384	29.5	
6	ABB	Great Hallingbury	Great Hallingbury Village Hall, Church Road, Great Hallingbury, CM22 7TY	Great Hallingbury	Broad Oak & The Hallingburys	Harlow	654	32.39	
7	ABC	Hatfield Broad Oak - Village	Hatfield Broad Oak Village Hall, Cage End, Hatfield Broad Oak, CM22 7HT	Hatfield Broad Oak - Village Ward	Broad Oak & The Hallingburys	Harlow	876	44.42	
8	ABD	Hatfield Broad Oak - Bush End	St. John the Evangelist Church, Bush End, CM22 6NF - See (A)RO Recommendation	Hatfield Broad Oak - Bush End Ward	Broad Oak & The Hallingburys	Harlow	105	36.78	To confirm the suggestion by the ARO for Harlow to discontinue use of this polling place and send voters to HBO Village Hall with ABC voters so all the parish vote at the village hall
9	ABE	Little Hallingbury	Little Hallingbury Village Hall, Lower Road, Little Hallingbury, CM22 7RD	Little Hallingbury	Broad Oak & The Hallingburys	Harlow	1231	29.31	
10	ACA	Arkesden	Arkesden Village Hall, Wenden Road, Arkesden, CB11 4HB	Arkesden	Clavering	North West Essex	303	46.64	
11	ACB	Clavering	Clavering Village Hall, Hill Green, Clavering, CB11 4QS	Clavering	Clavering	North West Essex	1072	35.06	
12	ACC	Langley	Langley Community Centre, Langley Upper Green, Saffron Walden, CB11 4RU	Langley	Clavering	North West Essex	303	38.7	
13	ACD	Wicken Bonhunt	St. Margaret's Church, Wicken Bonhunt, Saffron Walden, CB11 3UG	Wicken Bonhunt	Clavering	North West Essex	186	48.94	
14	ADA	Debden	Debden Memorial Hall, Mill Road, Debden, CB11 3LB	Debden	Debden & Wimbish	North West Essex	671	49.3	
15	ADB	Wimbish - Carver Barracks	Carver Barracks (The Community Hall), Off Elder Street, Wimbish, CB10 2YB	Wimbish	Debden & Wimbish	North West Essex	524	18.65	
16	ADC	Wimbish - Village	Wimbish Village Hall, Tye Green, Wimbish, CB10 2XE	Wimbish	Debden & Wimbish	North West Essex	485	35.1	
17	AEA	Elsenham	Elsenham Memorial Hall, Leigh Drive, Elsenham, CM22 6BY	Elsenham	Elsenham & Henham	North West Essex	2620	21.82	The A(RO) believes this place is big enough to accommodate electors from the new housing development and would have a minimum of 2 polling stations
18	AEA	Elsenham	Elsenham Memorial Hall, Leigh Drive, Elsenham, CM22 6BY	Elsenham	Elsenham & Henham	North West Essex	0	27.94	
19	AEB	Henham	Henham Village Hall, High Street, Henham, CM22 6AS	Henham	Elsenham & Henham	North West Essex	1075	35.85	
20	AFA	Felsted East	Crix Green Mission Hall, Crix Green, Felsted, CM6 3JT	Felsted	Felsted & Stebbing	Braintree	394	31.79	
21	AFB	Felsted West	Felsted Memorial Hall, Braintree Road, Felsted, CM6 3DS	Felsted	Felsted & Stebbing	Braintree	1973	29.88	
22	AFC	Stebbing	Stebbing Village Hall, Mill Lane, Stebbing, CM6 3SL	Stebbing	Felsted & Stebbing	Braintree	617	34.53	
23	AGA	Fitch Green	Fitch Green Community Hall, Tanton Road, Fitch Green, CM6 3GG	Fitch Green	Fitch Green & Little Dunmow	North West Essex	1614	23.32	
24	AGB	Little Dunmow	Community Meeting Room, Off Brook Street, Little Dunmow, CM6 3HU	Little Dunmow	Fitch Green & Little Dunmow	North West Essex	336	29.9	
25	AHA	Great Dunmow North-East Ward	The Dourdan Pavilion, Off the Causeway, Great Dunmow, CM6 2AA	Great Dunmow North Ward	Great Dunmow North	North West Essex	1961	26.58	
26	AHB	Great Dunmow North-West Ward	Great Dunmow Primary School, Walnut Walk, Woodlands Park Drive, CM6 1ZR	Great Dunmow North Ward	Great Dunmow North	North West Essex	1994	23.15	No alternative venue nearby, consider requesting the school to close at busy polls
27	AJA	Barnston	Barnston Village Hall, Chelmsford Road, Barnston, CM6 1LR	Barnston	Grea Dunmow South & Barnston	North West Essex	720	34.84	
28	AJB	Great Dunmow South-East	United Reformed Church Building, New Street, Great Dunmow, CM6 1BH	Great Dunmow South Ward	Grea Dunmow South & Barnston	North West Essex	2211	15.12	
29	AJB	Great Dunmow South-East	United Reformed Church Building, New Street, Great Dunmow, CM6 1BH	Great Dunmow South Ward	Grea Dunmow South & Barnston	North West Essex	0	22.02	
30	AJC	Great Dunmow South-West	E T Foakes Memorial Hall, Stortford Road, Great Dunmow, CM6 1DA	Great Dunmow South Ward	Grea Dunmow South & Barnston	North West Essex	2089	25.75	
31	AJC	Great Dunmow South-West	E T Foakes Memorial Hall, Stortford Road, Great Dunmow, CM6 1DA	Great Dunmow South Ward	Grea Dunmow South & Barnston	North West Essex	0	26.7	
32	AKA	Hatfield Heath	Hatfield Heath Village Hall, The Heath, Hatfield Heath, CM22 7ER	Hatfield Heath	Hatfield Heath	Harlow	1520	24.45	
33	AKB	White Roding	White Roding Social & Sports Club, Marks Hall Lane, White Roding, CM6 1RS	White Roding	Hatfield Heath	Harlow	277	35.71	
34	ALA	Aythorpe Roding	Aythorpe Roding Village Hall, Aythorpe Roding, Dunmow, CM6 1PS	Aythorpe Roding	High Easter & The Rodings	North West Essex	225	36.93	
35	ALB	High Easter	High Easter Village Hall, The Street, High Easter, CM1 4QR	High Easter	High Easter & The Rodings	North West Essex	597	35.77	
36	ALC	High Roding	High Roding W.I. Hall, The Street, High Roding, CM6 1NW	High Roding	High Easter & The Rodings	North West Essex	436	27.18	
37	ALD	Leaden Roding	Leaden Roding Village Hall, Stortford Road, Leaden Roding, CM6 1QX	Leaden Roding	High Easter & The Rodings	North West Essex	534	25.73	
38	ALE	Margaret Roding	The Reid Rooms, Marks Hall Lane, Margaret Roding, CM6 1QT	Margaret Roding	High Easter & The Rodings	North West Essex	174	17.01	
39	AMA	Chrishall	Chrishall Village Hall, Crawley End, Chrishall, SG8 8QJ	Chrishall	Littlebury, Chesterfords & W Lofts	North West Essex	457	40.15	
40.1	AMB	Duddenhoe End	Duddenhoe End Village Hall, Duddenhoe End, Saffron Walden, CB11 4UU	Elmdon, Wenden Lofts & Duddenhoe End - Duddenhoe End Ward	Littlebury, Chesterfords & W Lofts	North West Essex	169	45.74	
40.2	AMB1	Wenden Lofts	Duddenhoe End Village Hall, Duddenhoe End, Saffron Walden, CB11 4UU	Elmdon, Wenden Lofts & Duddenhoe End - Wenden Lofts Ward	Littlebury, Chesterfords & W Lofts	North West Essex	59	0	
41	AMC	Elmdon	Elmdon Village Hall, Cross Hill, Elmdon, CB11 4NE	Elmdon, Wenden Lofts & Duddenhoe End - Elmdon Village Ward	Littlebury, Chesterfords & W Lofts	North West Essex	295	46.79	
42	AMD	Great Chesterford	Chesterfords Community Centre, Newmarket Road, Great Chesterford, CB10 1NS	Great Chesterford	Littlebury, Chesterfords & W Lofts	North West Essex	1336	45.05	The A(RO) believes this place is big enough to accommodate electors from the new housing development and would have 2 polling stations in the future, if necessary
43.1	AME	Littlebury Green	St. Peter's Church Vestry, Littlebury Green, Saffron Walden, CB11 4XB	Littlebury	Littlebury, Chesterfords & W Lofts	North West Essex	193	42.93	
43.2	AME1	Strethall	St. Peter's Church Vestry, Littlebury Green, Saffron Walden, CB11 4XB	Strethall (Parish Meeting only)	Littlebury, Chesterfords & W Lofts	North West Essex	26	0	

44	AMF	Littlebury Village	Littlebury Village Hall, Walden Road, Littlebury, CB11 4TA	Littlebury	Littlebury, Chesterfords & W Lofts	North West Essex	483	39.95	
45	AMG	Little Chesterford	Little Chesterford Village Hall, High Street, Little Chesterford, CB10 1TT	Little Chesterford	Littlebury, Chesterfords & W Lofts	North West Essex	173	45.1	
46	AMH	Wendens Ambo	Wendens Ambo Village Hall, Royston Road, Wendens Ambo, CB11 4JX	Wendens Ambo	Littlebury, Chesterfords & W Lofts	North West Essex	376	41.53	
47	ANA	Newport	Newport Village Hall, Station Road, Newport, CB11 3PL	Newport	Newport	North West Essex	2289	31.01	
48	ANA	Newport	Newport Village Hall, Station Road, Newport, CB11 3PL	Newport	Newport	North West Essex	0	35.79	
49	ANB	Quendon & Rickling	Quendon & Rickling Village Hall, Cambridge Road, Quendon, CB11 3XQ	Quendon & Rickling	Newport	North West Essex	563	33.81	
50	ANC	Widdington	Widdington Village Hall, High Street, Widdington, CB11 3SG	Widdington	Newport	North West Essex	396	41.14	
51	AOA	Audley North	Saffron Walden Town Hall (Committee Room - Ground Floor), Market Street, CB10 1HE	Saffron Walden - Audley Ward	Saffron Walden Audley	North West Essex	1238	39.94	
52	AOB	Audley South	Council Offices (Staff Room - Ground Floor), London Road, CB11 4ER	Saffron Walden - Audley Ward	Saffron Walden Audley	North West Essex	2279	34.26	
53	APA	Castle East	Mobile Unit at Homebase Car Park, Elizabeth Way, Saffron Walden, CB10 2BL - See (AJRO Recommendation)	Saffron Walden - Castle & Little Walden Ward	Saffron Walden Castle	North West Essex	1640	34.04	To confirm the change to Saffron Walden Town Hall - different polling station (room) to the Audley North voters
54	APB	Castle West	Saffron Walden Community Church, Castle Street, Saffron Walden, CB10 1BD	Saffron Walden - Castle & Little Walden Ward	Saffron Walden Castle	North West Essex	1983	30.75	
55	AGA	Shire North	R A Butler Infant and Junior School (The Hall), South Road, CB11 3DG	Saffron Walden - Shire Ward	Saffron Walden Shire	North West Essex	3244	30.86	
56	AOA	Shire North	R A Butler Infant and Junior School (The Hall), South Road, CB11 3DG	Saffron Walden - Shire Ward	Saffron Walden Shire	North West Essex	0	34.6	
57	AQB	Shire South	Katherine Semar School (School Hall), Ross Close, CB11 4DU	Saffron Walden - Shire Ward	Saffron Walden Shire	North West Essex	1446	31.94	
58	AQB	Shire South	Katherine Semar School (School Hall), Ross Close, CB11 4DU	Saffron Walden - Shire Ward	Saffron Walden Shire	North West Essex	0	29.41	
59	ARA	Stansted North-East	St. John's Church Hall, St. Johns Road, Stansted, CM24 8JP	Stansted Mountfitchett - North Ward	Stansted North	North West Essex	1750	29.26	
60	ARB	Stansted North-West	The Mountfitchett Exchange, Crafton Green, 72 Chapel Hill, CM24 8AQ	Stansted Mountfitchett - North Ward	Stansted North	North West Essex	1886	30.81	To confirm this venue as the approved polling place as opposed to the Bentfield Primary School
61	ASA	Birchanger	St. Mary's Church Hall, Birchanger Lane, Birchanger, CM23 5QJ	Birchanger	Stansted South & Birchanger	North West Essex	697	38.4	
62	ASB	Stansted South	St. Mary's CoE Foundation Primary School (School Hall), Hampton Road, CM24 8FE	Stansted Mountfitchett - South Ward	Stansted South & Birchanger	North West Essex	2667	26.27	
63	ASB	Stansted South	St. Mary's CoE Foundation Primary School (School Hall), Hampton Road, CM24 8FE	Stansted Mountfitchett - South Ward	Stansted South & Birchanger	North West Essex	0	24.61	
64	ATA	Berden	Berden Village Hall, Berden, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 1AE	Berden	Stort Valley	North West Essex	391	43.2	
65	ATB	Farnham	Farnham Village Hall, Rectory Lane, Farnham, CM23 1HU	Farnham	Stort Valley	North West Essex	312	29.66	
66	ATC	Manuden	Manuden Village Community Centre, David Collins Drive, Manuden, CM23 1EH	Manuden	Stort Valley	North West Essex	544	30.93	
67	ATD	Ugley	The Patricia Lawrence Room, Ugley Village Hall, Cambridge Road, CM22 6HR	Ugley	Stort Valley	North West Essex	386	30.31	
68.1	AUA	Broxted	Broxted Village Hall, Browns End Road, Broxted, CM6 2BE	Broxted	Takeley	North West Essex	427	29.06	
68.2	AUA1	Chickney	Broxted Village Hall, Browns End Road, Broxted, CM6 2BE	Chickney (Parish Meeting only)	Takeley	North West Essex	38	0	
69	AUB	Little Canfield	Little Canfield Village Hall, Stortford Road, Little Canfield, CM6 1ST	Little Canfield	Takeley	North West Essex	898	17.95	
70	AUC	Takeley Mole Hill Green	Mole Hill Green Village Hall, Mole Hill Green, Takeley CM22 6PH	Takeley	Takeley	North West Essex	138	17.07	
71	AUD	Takeley Priors Green	Priors Green Community Hall, Bennet Canfield, Little Canfield, CM6 1YE	Takeley	Takeley	North West Essex	1410	21.23	
72	AUE	Takeley Village	The Old School Community Centre, Brewers End, CM22 6SB	Takeley	Takeley	North West Essex	2166	20.52	To confirm this as the approved polling place instead of the The Silver Jubilee Hall, Brewers End
73	AUE	Takeley Village	The Old School Community Centre, Brewers End, CM22 6SB	Takeley	Takeley	North West Essex	0	18.11	
74	AVA	Duton Hill	The Three Horseshoes (Function Room), Duton Hill, CM6 2DX	Great Easton & Tilty - Duton Hill Ward	Thaxted & The Eastons	North West Essex	299	27.31	
75.1	AVB	Great Easton Village	Great Easton Village Hall, Rebecca Meade, Great Easton, CM6 2HE	Great Easton & Tilty - Village Ward	Thaxted & The Eastons	North West Essex	468	35.76	
75.2	AVB1	Tilty	Great Easton Village Hall, Rebecca Meade, Great Easton, CM6 2HE	Great Easton & Tilty - Tilty Ward	Thaxted & The Eastons	North West Essex	74	0	
76	AVC	Lindsell	Lindsell Village Hall, Lindsell, Dunmow, CM6 3QN	Lindsell	Thaxted & The Eastons	North West Essex	216	42.63	
77	AVD	Little Easton	Little Easton Memorial Hall, Manor Road, Little Easton, CM6 2JR	Little Easton	Thaxted & The Eastons	North West Essex	334	46.91	
78	AVE	Thaxted	Bolford Street Hall, Bolford Street, Thaxted, CM6 2PY	Thaxted	Thaxted & The Eastons	North West Essex	2564	26.47	
79	AVE	Thaxted	Bolford Street Hall, Bolford Street, Thaxted, CM6 2PY	Thaxted	Thaxted & The Eastons	North West Essex	0	26.82	
80.1	AWA	Great Sampford	St. Michael's Church, Great Sampford, CB10 2RS	The Sampfords (Great Sampford Parish) NOTE: The Sampfords is a Common Parish Council comprising 2 civil parishes - Great & Little Sampford	The Sampfords	Braintree	491	43.13	To confirm this venue as the approved polling place as opposed to the Great Sampford Primary School
80.2	AWA1	Little Sampford	St. Michael's Church, Great Sampford, CB10 2RS	The Sampfords (Little Sampford Parish)	The Sampfords	Braintree	201	0	
81	AWB	Hempstead	Hempstead Village Hall, High Street, Hempstead, CB10 2PD	Hempstead	The Sampfords	Braintree	342	43.86	
82	AWC	Little Bardfield	Little Bardfield Cricket Club Pavilion, Little Bardfield, Braintree, CM7 4TT	Little Bardfield	The Sampfords	Braintree	203	28.72	
83	AWD	Radwinter	Radwinter Parish Hall, Water Lane, Radwinter, CB10 2TX	Radwinter	The Sampfords	Braintree	542	42.64	
Chelmsford	SAA	Mashbury	Boreham Village Hall (Allen Room), Main Road, Boreham, CM3 3JD	Boreham	Boreham and The Leighs	North West Essex	986	14.00	
Chelmsford	SAB	Boreham North	St Andrews Church (Boreham Church Hall), Church Road, Boreham, CM3 3EG	Boreham	Boreham and The Leighs	North West Essex	1810	20.00	
Chelmsford	SAC	Boreham South	Leighs Village Hall, Boreham Road, Great Leighs, CM3 1NH	Great and Little Leighs	Boreham and The Leighs	North West Essex	2090	22.00	
Chelmsford	SAD	Broomfield North	The Essex Barn, Channels Estate, Pratts Farm Lane East, Little Waltham, CM3 3PT	Chelmsford Garden - East Parish Ward	Boreham and The Leighs	North West Essex	44	11.00	
Chelmsford	SBA	Broomfield Village	Chelmer Valley High School, Court Road, Broomfield, CM1 7ER	Broomfield	Broomfield and The Walthams	North West Essex	1534	22.00	
Chelmsford	SBB	Broomfield North-West	Broomfield Village Hall, 158 Main Road, Broomfield, CM1 7AH	Broomfield	Broomfield and The Walthams	North West Essex	2367	29.00	
Chelmsford	SBC	Belsteads	Great Waltham Village Hall, South Street, Great Waltham, CM3 1DF	Great Waltham - Church End Parish Ward	Broomfield and The Walthams	North West Essex	1185	27.00	
Chelmsford	SBD	Chignal	St. John the Evangelist's Church, Church Lane/Sandon Hill, Ford End, CM3 1LH	Great Waltham	Broomfield and The Walthams	North West Essex	532	18.00	
Chelmsford	SBE	Good Easter	Little Waltham Memorial Hall (Main Hall), 15 Brook Hill, Little Waltham, CM3 3LN	Little Waltham	Broomfield and The Walthams	North West Essex	888	27.00	
Chelmsford	SBF	Great & Little Leighs	The Essex Barn, Channels Estate, Pratts Farm Lane East, Little Waltham, CM3 3PT	Chelmsford Garden - North Parish ward	Broomfield and The Walthams	North West Essex	1473	20.00	
Chelmsford	SCA	Church End	Chignals and Mashbury Village Hall, Mashbury Road, Chignal St James, CM1 4TS	Chignal	Chelmsford Rural West	North West Essex	490	26.00	
Chelmsford	SCB	Ford End	Good Easter Village Hall, School Road, Good Easter, CM1 4RT	Good Easter	Chelmsford Rural West	North West Essex	297	25.00	
Chelmsford	SCC	Highwood	Chignals and Mashbury Village Hall, Mashbury Road, Chignal St James, CM1 4TS	NOT PARISHED	Chelmsford Rural West	North West Essex	79	27.00	
Chelmsford	SCD	Little Waltham	Highwood Village Hall, Highwood Road, Loves Green, CM1 3DG	Highwood	Chelmsford Rural West	North West Essex	549	23.00	
Chelmsford	SCE	Pleshey	Roxwell Memorial Hall (Reading Room), The Street, Roxwell, CM1 4PA	Roxwell	Chelmsford Rural West	North West Essex	820	24.00	

Chelmsford	SCF	Roxwell	Pleshey Village Hall, The Street, Pleshey, CM3 1HB	Pleshey	Chelmsford Rural West	North West Essex	207	36.00
Chelmsford	SDA	Writtle East	Writtle Village Hall (Rear Hall), 18 The Green, Writtle, CM1 3DU	Writtle	Writtle	North West Essex	1828	26.00
Chelmsford	SDB	Writtle West	The Beryl Platt Centre, 12-14 Redwood Drive, Writtle, CM1 3LY	Writtle	Writtle	North West Essex	2011	31.00

**Key:**

Double station at local elections in May 2023

Split polling districts

Chelmsford City Council polling stations that come under the NEW constituency - currently being reviewed by Chelmsford City Council's A(RO).

**Note 1**

Under the Parliamentary Boundary Review - the Saffron Walden Constituency will change with 2 wards coming under Harlow and 2 under Braintree at a general election and the constituency name will change to North West Essex.

**Committee:** Audit and Standards Committee

**Date:**

28 November 2023

**Title:** Interim Community Governance Review 2023  
– Results from consultation

**Report Author:** Phil Hardy, Electoral Services Manager

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## Summary

1. The Interim Community Governance Review of four parish council boundaries commenced in October 2023 and this report incorporates the feedback on the proposals from the consultation and recommends support for the changes.

## Recommendation

2. To approve the recommendations as set out in Section 6, and as shown in the Appendices.

## Financial Implications

3. There are no financial implications other than officer time.

## Background Papers

4. All papers referred to by the author in the preparation of this report are already published and are widely available.

## Impact

5.

Communication/Consultation	Consultation with statutory consultees, the public and all parish and town councils within the district will take place.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	Any alterations to parish boundaries may have an impact on ward boundaries.
Workforce/Workplace	None

## Situation

6. The Councils referred to in the body of this report requested the revised boundary change to accommodate large scale housing development and are fully supportive of the proposed realignment of their boundaries.

### **6.1 Saffron Walden Town Council/Sewards End Parish Council Boundary Realignment**

The full parish Community Governance Review in 2021/22 left this area open to be further reviewed should a housing development referred to as north Shire Hill, be given planning permission. That has subsequently happened, and both the Town and the Parish Council have jointly agreed that this area should be recommended for transfer from the Sewards End Parish to come under Saffron Walden Town Council's boundary.

It is recommended that the Council support the proposal as shown in Appendix 1.

### **6.2 Great and Little Chesterford Parish Councils Boundary Realignment**

Great and Little Chesterford parish councils jointly put forward a proposal for the boundary between the two parishes to be further reviewed and realigned based on a subsequent housing development site that falls in Little Chesterford and the proposal moves the boundary so this housing site would come under Great Chesterford parish.

It is recommended that the Council support the proposal and the "revised boundary" put forward from comments received (see 6.3 below) and as shown at Appendix 2.

### **6.3 Consultation and next steps**

#### **Comments received:**

#### **Saffron Walden Town Council and Sewards End Parish Council**

Communication was received from both Saffron Walden Town Council and Sewards End Parish Council for this Council to support the realigned boundary, as shown at Appendix 1.

No other comments were received.

#### **Great and Little Chesterford Parish Councils**

A proposal has come forward during the consultation period from a Great Chesterford resident to tweak the proposed boundary between Great and Little Chesterford as shown at Appendix 2, thus leaving the whole of the flood plain and access to the river within Great Chesterford.

Subsequently, a further communication has been received from the Parish Clerk of Great Chesterford saying the following:

*I can confirm that both Great and Little Chesterford Parish Councils support the suggestion to include the piece of land behind the new development including the flood plain and up to the river in the land transferred to Great Chesterford along with the land for development.*



## Consequential changes

The properties built on the Swards End development site would subsequently come under the Saffron Walden Shire Ward, and the Saffron Walden County Council Electoral Division. This site currently comes under the Ashdon Ward and the Thaxted Electoral Division. There are no existing properties affected by the change.

Both the Chesterfords come under the same district ward – Littlebury, Chesterford and Wenden Lofts and the Saffron Walden electoral division. There are also no existing properties affected by the change.

It is not proposed to change the level of representation for any of the councils concerned, as this was considered as part of the 2021/22 review.

The next step would be for this Council to make a legal Order and the changes would come in to affect from the date stated in the Order.

The Local Government Boundary Commission will carry out the necessary Consequential Order to realign the district ward and county electoral division boundaries.

## Risk Analysis

7.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigating actions</b>
2 That identities and interests of the local community in the area are not reflected, and that community governance is not effective or convenient	2	2	To conduct a review to realign the parish boundaries are in the interests of the local community

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

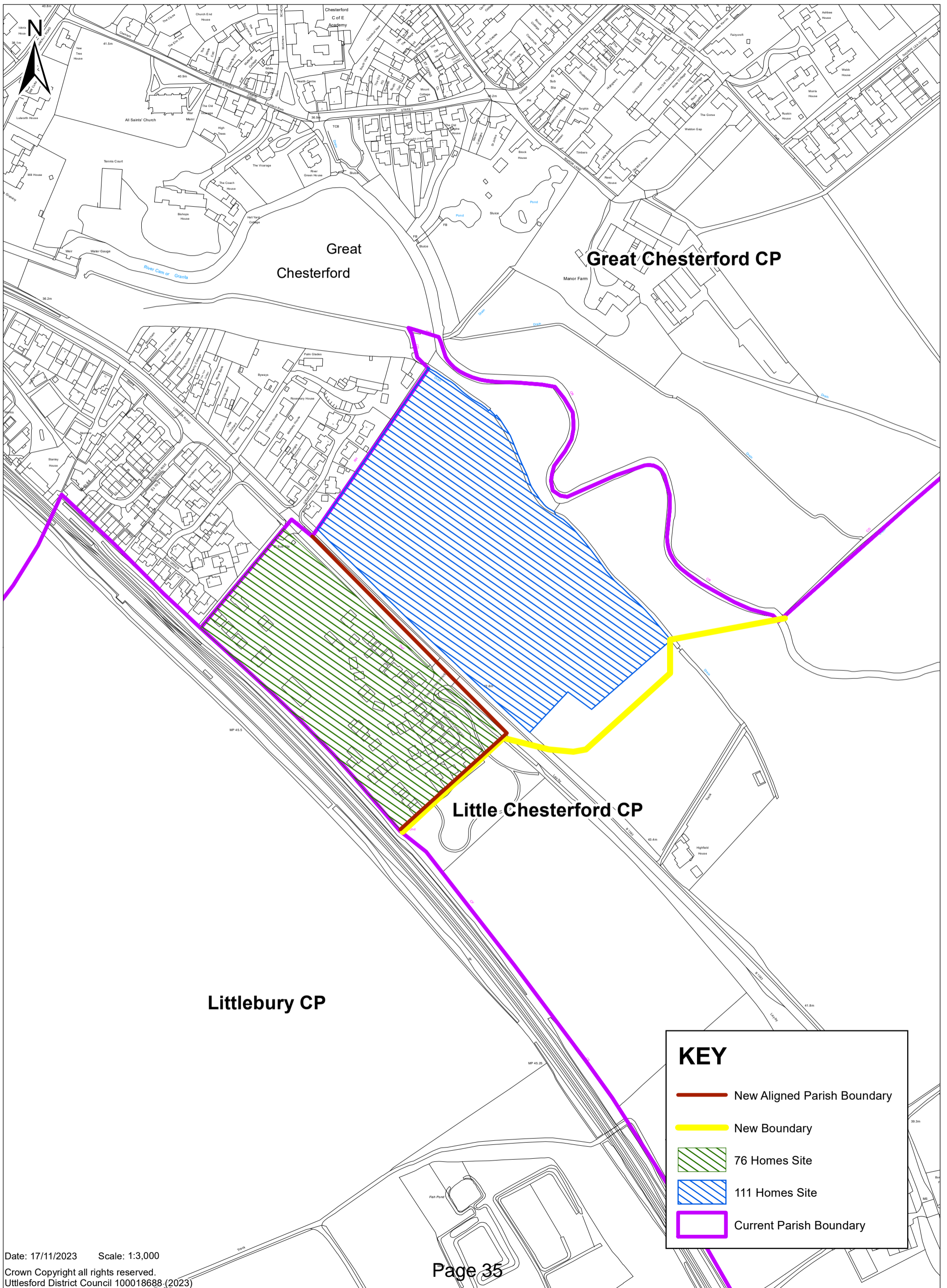
3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

# Map showing Saffron Walden and Swards End boundary for Rosconn homes site



# Proposed Parish Boundary Amendment between Great and Little Chesterford



# Agenda Item 6

**Committee:** Audit and Standards Committee

**Date:**

**Title:** Data breaches and Direct Debits

Tuesday, 28  
November 2023

**Report Author:** Adrian Webb, Strategic Director of Finance,  
Commercialisation and Corporate Services

awebb@uttlesford.gov.uk

Tel: 01799 510421

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## Summary

1. This report advises Members of three recent data breaches that have been referred to the Information Commissioner, as of the date of writing the report no replies have been received. A verbal update will be given at the meeting.
2. The report also provides Members with an overview of the 1 November direct debit issue that resulted in payments being requested from customer's accounts two days early.

## Recommendations

3. Members note the report.

## Financial Implications

4. As set out in the report.

## Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

None

## Impact

Communication/Consultation	Social media was used to notify residents of the direct debit error and to explain what was being done to correct it.
Community Safety	n/a
Equalities	n/a
Health and Safety	n/a
Human Rights/Legal Implications	Legally where direct debits are requested early they must be refunded.

Sustainability	n/a
Ward-specific impacts	n/a
Workforce/Workplace	n/a

## Situation

### Data Breaches

6. Since July 2023 the Council has encountered three data breaches that it felt appropriate to self-refer to the Information Commissioner. The breaches were in the following areas
  - a. Housing Benefits
  - b. Council Tax
  - c. Assets
7. High level summaries for each of the breaches is as follows
  - a. Housing Benefit

Event that gave rise to the breach	A notice was received from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) advising a claimant's child had left the property and a new address given.
What happened	A letter was sent, addressed to the claimant, at the child's new address advising them that the Council had received information that they (the claimant) had vacated the address and asking for more detail.
What should have happened	To write to the claimant requesting confirmation of the change for their child and any related information.
Potential consequences	The claimant had moved to Uttlesford due to domestic violence in their previous location. The action taken disclosed to the residents of the written to address both the address of the claimant and the fact that they were on benefits.
Corrective action taken	An apology was sent to the claimant who was moved to alternative temporary accommodation and has now moved to a new address. Reminder sent to all Benefits staff of the correct process. All Benefits staff undertook refresher General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) training.

b. Council Tax

Event that gave rise to the breach	A Council Tax bill for a new occupancy of a house was issued.
What happened	The Council Tax bill was sent to a 'care of' address rather than the address of the property for which Council Tax was due. The occupant of the 'care of' address forwarded the bill to the correct address.
Potential consequences	The Council Tax payer had moved from the 'care of' address due to domestic violence. The action taken disclosed to the resident of the 'care of' address the address that the Council Tax payer had moved to.
Corrective action taken	An apology was sent to the Council Tax payer who has moved to an alternative property awaiting the availability of a suitable council property. Council Tax team advised immediately by email, and followed up at a team meeting, of the correct process. Individual meeting with the officer who made the mistake. New procedure notes with enhanced summary checklist.

c. Assets

Event that gave rise to the breach	A confidential waste bag went missing from an office.
What happened	A confidential waste bag, containing paper copies of 14 job applicants went missing from an office. It took several weeks for the loss to be identified.
Potential consequences	The most likely thing that happened was that the cleaner removed the bag and disposed of it in the general waste. However, the potential risk is that the application forms would provide some information about individuals (name, address, National Insurance Number) that could risk identity fraud. However, the forms did not disclose other information that would be needed such as date of birth.
Corrective action taken	All affected job applicants have been written to informing them of the breach and apologising. A secure confidential waste bin has been installed in the office, replacing the need for just a confidential waste bag.

8. The Information Commissioner will decide whether or not to investigate any or all of the breaches and if felt serious enough has a number of sanctions available, ranging from public reprimands through to large scale fines.
9. In June 2022 The Information Commissioner wrote to all public bodies advising them that he was inclined towards public reprimands for public bodies rather than large fines, as the deterrent of a fine is less of an impact on a public body than it is on a private company with directors and shareholders.

### **Direct Debits**

10. The main Council Tax direct debit collection run happens on the 1<sup>st</sup> working day of each month. For November that amounted to circa £5.3 million being collected from around 21,000 customer bank accounts.
11. The direct debit file is generated several days in advance. Part of the process to generate the file is entering the collection date i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> November. If no date is entered the system defaults to two days' time.
12. Following a similar, but much smaller issue, with the mid-August direct debit collections, an authorisation process within the direct debit system was introduced. This meant that when the direct debit file was loaded into the direct debit processing system, an authorising officer would review the automated emails and within twenty minutes reject the file if it was incorrect. If the file is not rejected within the allocated 20 minutes it is automatically processed.
13. The 1<sup>st</sup> of November file was generated four days in advance of the due date, but the Officer forgot to change the collection date, so it defaulted to two days' time i.e. 30<sup>th</sup> October. The file was uploaded to the direct debit processing system and the twenty minutes elapsed due to the authorising officer being in another meeting.
14. Once a direct debit file is processed there is no way to recall or cancel it, so all the circa £5.3 million was going to be collected two days early on 30<sup>th</sup> October.
15. Under the direct debit rules, any error such as this should be corrected by refunding the account as soon as possible.
16. The issue faced was further compounded by the fact that the error came to light on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> October and customer accounts would be debited just after midnight on the morning of Monday 30<sup>th</sup> October.
17. Officers worked during the day and into the evening creating, validating and processing bank payment files which would refund the customer at almost the same time as the payment was collected thereby avoiding any financial issues for the customer.
18. Social media and the Council website were used to publicise the error and the corrective action taken. Councillors were also advised on the 27<sup>th</sup> October. Clear guidance was provided for the Customer Services telephone team to

ensure a consistent message was relayed to people who rang in on the Monday morning.

19. The financial cost to the Council is in the region of £5,000 which relates primarily to bank charges. Each direct debit run sees a number of rejected collections, normally where the customer has cancelled the direct debit. This occurred in approximately eighty accounts in the November file and the Council is currently in contact with the account holders to recover the 'refunds' made to their accounts on 30<sup>th</sup> October.
20. The direct debit file was reprocessed with the correct date and the £5.3 million was collected from customer accounts as normal on the 1<sup>st</sup> November.
21. A new process is now in place whereby there is an authorisation procedure within the direct debit system which requires an authorising officer to positively approve the file before it can be processed.