

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISION TO BE MADE UNDER RULE 9 (URGENT CABINET DECISIONS) of OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES

The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Notice is hereby given under the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 (“the Regulations”) that the following non-key decision will be made by the Leader on 17 February 2026 and will not be subject to call-in:

Response to the Government on the Structural Changes Order for Local Government Reorganisation

The Chairman of Uttlesford District Council has been informed by notice in writing of the matter about which the decision is to be made and agrees that the decision proposed is reasonable and to it being treated as a matter of urgency due to the Government’s deadline for submission of 17 February 2026. A decision will be urgent if any delay caused by the call in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the public's interests.

RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISION: **PUBLISHED ON 17 FEBRUARY 2026**

Decision maker	Details of Decision	Reasons	Other options considered and rejected	Conflict of interest declared by any Executive member consulted	Contact officer from where the documents can be obtained
Cllr Petrina Lees, Leader of the Council	RESOLVED to approve the response to the government on the Structural Changes Order for Local Government Reorganisation as appended to the decision notice.	<p>To respond to the Government’s request for representations to the drafting of the Structural Changes Order that Government will prepare and lay before parliament later in 2026 to facilitate delivery of Local Government Reorganisation in Essex.</p> <p>The government believes reorganising councils into a smaller number of single-tier unitary councils will deliver stronger local councils equipped to deliver high quality public services.</p> <p>The government expects to set out their decision on which to proposal to implement in March 2026.</p> <p>The Structural Changes</p>	None.	None.	Angela Knight, Chief Operating Officer aknight@uutlesford.gov.uk

		<p>Order will set out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• dates for transition,• how the new unitary councils will be established (and current councils abolished),• how the new unitary councils will be initially established in 'shadow' form in 2027 and until they formally go-live in 2028,• arrangements for elections• other transitional arrangements <p>Responding to this request for input ensures that the views of the council are considered in the drafting of the SCO.</p> <p>The council is looking to respond to the consultation jointly with other councils in Greater Essex before the deadline on 17 February 2026.</p>			
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The decision will come into force immediately and will not be subject to call-in.

Republished on 17 February 2026



Uttlesford District Council

Dear Ruth

RE: LETTER TO CHIEF EXECUTIVES OF ESSEX, SOUTHEND-ON-SEA AND THURROCK COUNCILS, 16 JANUARY 2026

As the Chief Executives of **all 15 councils** in Greater Essex, we write in response to your letter of 16 October 2025.

Notwithstanding that the Minister has yet to make their decision on the final configuration for local government in Greater Essex, Chief Executives and Leaders have been working together to address the complexity of the issues which your letter raises. We are proud that there has been system collaboration to enable Greater Essex to get to this point, and despite differences of opinion, all councils remain committed to develop the local arrangements which will be necessary to give effect to the Minister's decision, whatever that might be.

Reorganisation in Essex requires not just the re-drawing of existing boundaries and the aggregation of district functions and disaggregation of county council functions to those boundaries but also requires services provided by two existing unitary councils to be added into the new councils. Government's ask is for this to be done very quickly across an area serving 1.9m residents. The size and complexity of the Greater Essex system, means that there is no direct analogy in previous reorganisations.

You have posed seven questions. We have summarised the position of the councils in the answers below. Where we have achieved consensus as between all or some of us, we have made that clear and equally where there is divergence of opinion, we have set that out also. One or more individual councils may want to supplement this response with more thoughts of their own.

This response is the culmination of considerable effort and extensive political discussion and compromise across all 15 councils who have worked together to strive to provide the requested single representation for each proposal for the Secretary of State to consider.

Q1: How many members from each relevant council would you prefer to sit on each Joint Committee, including the balance of members from different councils?

There has been significant debate between Leaders to attempt to find consensus. However, the current position of the councils is as set out below:

a) Proposal from Basildon Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council and Harlow District Council

Basildon Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council and Harlow District Council propose equality of votes/seats across all councils as per the “Cumbria” model.

b) Proposal from Essex County Council and Epping Forest District Council

- Where a joint committee does not include the area of an existing unitary, the Surrey model should be adopted, i.e. 50% district, 50% county councils. This will help ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the impact on social care, education and SEND in particular.

Where a joint committee does include the area of one or both existing unitary councils we would advocate for a model where a third of the members come from existing unitary councils, a third from ECC and a third from district councils.

This proposal results in the membership as shown in the appendix to this letter.

c) Proposal from Braintree District Council, Chelmsford City Council, Colchester City Council, Maldon District Council, Southend on Sea City Council, Tendring District Council, Thurrock Council and Uttlesford District Council

This proposal is considered by the above district and unitary councils to be an attempt at compromise by district councils from the equality of votes “Cumbria” model. The proposal reflects an acquiescence of a greater number of seats/votes for Essex County Council than the individual district councils in each new unitary council. The model also reflects a greater number of seats/votes for Southend on Sea City Council and Thurrock Council for those new unitary councils in the south.

Proposal	Three			Four (Thurrock)				Four (Rochford)				Five				
	North	Mid	South	North	East	South	West	West	North	Mid	South	West	NE	Mid	SW	SE
Thurrock			4				8				3				4	
Southend			4			8					3					6
Essex County	4	5	2	3	3	2	2	3	3	4	2	3	3	3	2	2
Basildon			2			2					2				2	
Braintree	2			2					2				2			
Brentwood		2					2			2				2		
Castle Point			2			2					2					2
Chelmsford		2		2						2				2		
Colchester	2				2				2				2			
Epping Forest		2					2	2				2				
Harlow		2					2	2				2				
Maldon		2			2					2				2		
Rochford			2			2				2						2
Tendring	2				2				2				2			
Uttlesford	2			2				2				2				
Total	12	15	16	9	9	16	16	9	9	12	12	9	9	9	8	12

d) Proposal from Brentwood Borough Council and Rochford District Council

Brentwood Borough Council and Rochford District Council support, in principle, the model proposed in paragraph c above model save for the following modifications:

- for 4UA Thurrock model – Thurrock Council and Southend on Sea City Council to hold 4 seats/votes each; and
- for the 5UA model - Southend on Sea City Council to hold 4 seats/votes.

All councils agree that the actual number of votes/seats will depend on numbers of predecessor councils as set out in the tables above.

Subject to the above all councils agree there should be a minimum of 1 member for each existing council in each Joint Committee, although we recognise that having more members per each existing council would increase the resilience of the Joint Committee.

To ensure the business of the Joint Committees can proceed without disruption all councils agree there should be provisions for the membership to appoint substitutes to attend in their absence (though this can be done in each council's constitution).

In addition to above Rochford District Council call for parity in seats with a minimum of two appointments per council.

Q2: Would you prefer for any individuals to be specified for the Chair/Deputy Chair roles, and if so, who?

a) Proposal from Essex County Council and Epping Forest District Council

- In any Joint Committee not including the area of an existing unitary, the Joint Committee should be chaired by an ECC member, with a vice chairman from a district council.
- In relation to a Joint Committee including one existing unitary council the Joint Committee should be chaired by a nominee of that unitary member, with an Essex County Council Vice Chair.
- In relation to a Joint Committee including both existing unitary councils the Chair should come from Essex County Council with two vice Chairs, one from each existing unitary..

b) Proposal from all other councils

The remaining 13 councils support the position that the Joint Committees should appoint their own Chairs and Deputies once convened.

The caveat to this is the view of Southend on Sea City Council and Thurrock Council that in the 4UA Thurrock model and the 5UA model, Joint Committees in new unitary areas which contain existing unitary areas should be chaired by those existing unitary councils. In the 3UA model and 4UA model Rochford which comprises both existing unitary councils, the chair of the Joint Committee should be one or other of them.

Q3: What are your views on any requirement for political balance in the implementation executive/joint committee(s)?

All 15 councils believe that the Structural Changes Order should make it clear that any requirement to make politically balanced appointments which may otherwise apply should be disapplied from the Joint Committees.

Q4: What would be your preferences for the membership of the Implementation Team and whether roles should be specified?

Membership

a) Proposal from Essex County Council and Epping Forest District Council

Essex County Council and EFDC believes that the structure of the implementation team needs to be able to identify cross-cutting issues, work across the system. We support a single implementation team led by a single SRO with a system wide implementation plan endorsed by the joint committees. There would then be a geographical lead appointed by the joint committee with accountability for local implementation plans which are consistent with the system wide plan.

This respects the needs for a local approach but also recognising the significant risks to disaggregation and also the fact that implementation cannot be done entirely at a unitary level and that there are likely to be issues beyond disaggregation of ECC services.

b) Proposal from all other councils

All thirteen other councils agree that there should be one implementation team and Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for the disaggregation of Essex County Council functions, together with a separate 'place-based' implementation team and SRO for each new unitary council to reflect the uniqueness of each of the new places.

They are of the view that implementation arrangements must provide clear accountabilities to the government, to all Essex Leaders and Chief Executives, and to the joint committees, (which will initially be in voluntary arrangements). The arrangements need to be managed in a way that respects the responsibilities and sovereignty of existing councils, including three upper tier local authorities, in an equitable manner.

The remaining 13 councils believe that the remit and scope of the central team should be limited to the disaggregation of Essex County Council functions, whilst working with the other SROs in equal partnership on the development of non-binding options for cross-county collaboration and innovation. To support system-wide assurance, a Greater Essex LGR Implementation Board would be established, evolving the current system, bringing together each Implementation Lead as an equal partner, with responsibility for monitoring progress, ensuring alignment, identifying risks early, and acting as the assurance body to MHCLG. The Chair would serve as the primary contact for MHCLG.

Specification of roles

All 15 councils agree that the central implementation Team should be led by the Chief Executive of Essex County Council.

The majority of councils agree that the SROs of the place-based implementation teams cannot be decided until after the Minister's decision has been made. As all 15 councils have been continuously working together in the spirit of that duty, it is proposed that the selection of the SROs will be made by each voluntary Joint Committee after consulting the existing councils for each new unitary area, so that they can ensure that the implementation teams have the right resources allocated to them but also ensure that they are able to continue to deliver the services of their respective councils. This information will be provided to Government as part of the finalisation of the Structural Changes Order.

The exception to this is the view of Southend on Sea City Council and Thurrock Council that in the 4UA Thurrock model and the 5UA model, the implementation teams for those new unitary areas which contain existing unitary areas should be led by those existing unitary councils. In the 3UA model and 4UA model Rochford which

comprises both existing unitary councils, the implementation team should be led by one or other of them.

Q5: Who should be the returning officer for the first election to each of the new unitary councils, that proposals would see established.

All 15 councils agree that the returning officers for each of the new unitary councils cannot be formally decided until after the Minister has made their decision.

Currently there are 14 different permutations', and therefore it is extremely difficult for any potential returning officer to fully understand the areas for which they would hold responsibility, or to fully consider any associated risks. As each returning officer holds personal liability, it is important that any potential returning officer is allowed to fully understand the role as a whole.

Therefore, discussions have been taking place, and we are confident that we will be able to confirm our proposal for the appointment of returning officers very shortly after the Minister' decision has been taken. **All 15 councils** agree that the returning officers should be selected based on their experience of running elections and, of course, their consent to the appointment, to be agreed between ROs.

Q6: Would you prefer for any parish council elections to be aligned with elections to the new councils?

The preference of the councils is set out in the table below:

Yes	No
Basildon Borough Council	Colchester City Council
Braintree District Council	Maldon District Council
Brentwood Borough Council	
Castle Point Borough Council	
Chelmsford City Council	
Epping Forest District Council	
Rochford District Council	
Southend City Council	
Tendring District Council	
Uttlesford District Council	
Essex County Council	

Harlow District Council and Thurrock Council have no parish/town councils and so have expressed no preference.

Q7: What are the current legal names of the councils and what would be your preferred names for new councils?

The legal names of the existing councils are as follows:

1. Basildon Borough Council
2. Braintree District Council
3. Brentwood Borough Council
4. Castle Point Borough Council

5. Chelmsford City Council
6. Colchester City Council
7. Epping Forest District Council
8. Essex County Council
9. Harlow District Council
10. Maldon District Council
11. Rochford District Council
12. Southend on Sea City Council
13. Tendring District Council
14. Thurrock Council
15. Uttlesford District Council

All 15 councils are content for the names referenced in the relevant proposals to be used in the Structural Changes Order. These are set out below:

3UA	4UA(T)	4UA(R)	5UA
North Essex Council	North Essex Council	North Essex Council	North East Essex Council
Mid Essex Council	East Essex Council	Mid Essex Council	Mid Essex Council
South Essex Council	West Essex Council	West Essex Council	West Essex Council
	South Essex Council	South Essex Council	South West Essex Council
			South East Essex Council

There is a preference for the new names to not include 'Unitary Authority'. This recognises the custom and practice with other established unitary councils and would allow for continued and common terminology and language to be used by residents. Regardless, of terminology used, all newly established councils within Essex should use the same terminology.

Yours Sincerely

Gary Jones
*Chief Executive Officer,
Basildon Borough
Council*

Dan Gascoyne
*Chief Executive Officer,
Braintree District Council*

Jonathan Stephenson
*Chief Executive Officer,
Brentwood Borough
Council & Rochford
District Council*

Angela Hutchings
*Chief Executive Officer,
Castle Point Borough
Council*

Nick Eveleigh
*Chief Executive Officer,
Chelmsford City Council*

Pamela Donnelly
*Chief Executive Officer,
Colchester City Council*

Andrew Small
Chief Executive Officer,

Nicole Wood
Chief Executive Officer,

James Gardner
Managing Director,

Epping Forest District Council

Essex County Council

Harlow Council

Doug Wilkinson
*Chief Executive Officer
Maldon District Council*

Colin Ansell
*Chief Executive Officer,
Southend-on-Sea City Council*

Ian Davidson
*Chief Executive Officer,
Tendring District Council*

Dr Dave Smith
*Chief Executive Officer,
Thurrock Council*

Peter Holt
*Chief Executive Officer,
Uttlesford District Council*

Appendix

Joint Committee Membership as put forward by Essex County Council

Joint Committee	Existing Councils in the Joint Committee	Membership of the Joint Committee per Council
3 unitary proposal: North Essex unitary	Essex CC Tendring DC Colchester CC Braintree DC Uttlesford DC	4 members 1 member 1 member 1 member 1 member
3 unitary proposal: Mid Essex unitary	Essex CC Maldon DC Chelmsford CC Brentwood BC Epping Forest DC Harlow DC	5 members 1 member 1 member 1 member 1 member 1 member
3 unitary proposal: South Essex unitary	Essex CC Thurrock BC Southend CC Basildon BC Castle Point BC Rochford DC	3 members 2 members 2 members 1 members 1 members 1 members

Joint Committee	Existing Councils in the Joint Committee	Membership of the Joint Committee per Council
4 unitary Thurrock proposal: North Essex unitary	Essex CC Uttlesford DC Braintree DC Chelmsford CC	6 members 2 members 2 members 2 members

4 unitary Thurrock proposal: East Essex unitary	Essex CC Tendring DC Colchester CC Maldon DC	6 members 2 members 2 members 2 members
4 unitary Thurrock proposal: South Essex unitary	Essex CC Southend UC Basildon BC Castle Point DC Rochford DC	3 members 3 members 1 member 1 member 1 member
4 unitary Thurrock proposal: West Essex unitary	Essex CC Thurrock UC Epping Forest DC Brentwood BC Harlow DC	3 members 3 members 1 member 1 member 1 member

Joint Committee	Existing Councils in the Joint Committee	Membership of the Joint Committee per Council
4 unitary Rochford proposal: North Essex unitary	Essex CC Tendring DC Colchester DC Braintree DC	6 members 2 member 2 member 2 member
4 unitary Rochford proposal: West Essex unitary	Essex CC Uttlesford DC Harlow DC Epping Forest DC	6 members 2 member 2 member 2 member
4 unitary Rochford proposal: Central Essex unitary	Essex CC Maldon DC Rochford DC Chelmsford DC Brentwood DC	4 members 1 member 1 member 1 member 1 member
4 unitary Rochford proposal: South Essex unitary	Essex CC Thurrock UC Southend UC Basildon DC Castle Point BC	4 members 2 members 2 members 2 members 2 members

Joint Committee	Existing Councils in the Joint Committee	Membership of the Joint Committee per Council
5 unitary proposal: West Essex unitary	Essex CC Uttlesford DC Harlow DC Epping Forest DC	6 members 2 members 2 members 2 members

5 unitary proposal: North-East Essex unitary	Essex CC Tendring DC Colchester DC Braintree DC	6 members 2 members 2 members 2 members
5 unitary proposal: Mid Essex unitary	Essex CC Maldon DC Chelmsford CC Brentwood BC	6 members 2 members 2 members 2 members

Joint Committee	Existing Councils in the Joint Committee	Membership of the Joint Committee per Council
5 unitary proposal: South-West Essex unitary	Essex CC Thurrock UC Basildon BC	4 members 4 members 2 members
5 unitary proposal: South-East Essex unitary	Essex CC Southend CC Castle Point BC Rochford DC	4 members 4 members 2 members 2 members