

**Committee:** Council

**Date:** Tuesday, 14  
July 2026

**Title:** Local Government Reorganisation – Urgent  
Executive Decision

**Report  
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Projects

**Lead  
Member:** Cllr Petrina Lees, Leader

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## Summary

1. To provide an update on the decision to submit a response to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government concerning the content of the Structural Change Order for Local Government Reorganisation.
2. The response confirmed the Council's position on warding arrangements for the Uttlesford area of West Essex Council, confirmed the Council's recommendation for Returning Officers for West Essex Council and confirmed the Council's position on parish election arrangements.
3. On 25 March 2026, the government announced its [decision for five unitary councils](#) to replace the existing county, unitary, city, district and borough councils in Greater Essex. The government asked councils in Essex to submit further information to inform the Structural Change Order by 29 May 2026. The timescale for collating a joint response required an urgent decision that would not allow for the call-in period.
4. The Chairman of the Council was informed by notice in writing of the matter about which the decision was to be made and agreed that the decision proposed was reasonable and to it being treated as a matter of urgency due to the Government's deadline for submission.
5. This report has been brought before full Council as a requirement of the Council's urgent Cabinet decision process; the decision was formalised via Urgent Cabinet Decisions, as set out in Rule 9 (Urgent Cabinet Decisions) of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

## Recommendations

6. To note that the decision was taken under Rule 9 (Urgent Cabinet Decisions – Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules) to approve Uttlesford District Council's position to inform a single, joint response to the government from all the Essex Councils on the Structural Changes Order for Local Government Reorganisation as summarised below and as detailed in 8.a Appendix 1 LGR UDC SCO Response:
  - a. To confirm the Council's position on warding arrangements for the Uttlesford area of West Essex Council

- b. To confirm the Council's recommendations for Returning Officers for West Essex Council
- c. To confirm the Council's position on parish election arrangements

## Financial Implications

- 7. None in respect of the Council's response.

## Background Papers

- 8. 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.
  - a. [Appendix 1 LGR UDC SCO Response Executive Decision Notice dated 20 May 2026 to approve Uttlesford District Council's position on the content of the Structural Change Order](#)

## Impact

- 9.

Communication/Consultation	<p>The Chairman of Full Council has been informed in writing of the matter and has agreed that the decision is both urgent and reasonable.</p> <p>The LGR Task and Finish Group were engaged in developing the Council's response on the proposed warding arrangements.</p> <p>Officers of the Council engaged with colleagues at Epping Forest District Council and Harlow Council to agree a joint position on the nomination of a Returning Officer for the inaugural elections in 2027, and to discuss the warding and parish election arrangements.</p>
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	This non-key executive decision has been processed in accordance with The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and Rule 9 (Urgent Cabinet

	Decisions) of UDC's Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	The Structural Change Order will set out transition arrangements for the formation of the new West Essex Council including arrangements for warding and inaugural elections to be held in 2027.
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

## Situation

10. 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. Unitary councils will be responsible for all council services in an area. Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock are examples of a unitary council. Through this process of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), the government wants to:
  - a. help local areas have more say in their future
  - b. make councils work better and more efficiently
  - c. help people know who is responsible for services
11. [Four proposals](#) for how unitary councils should be organised were submitted in September 2025, supported with significant evidence and analysis.
12. The five unitary model was Uttlesford District Council's preferred option as it strikes the right balance for residents and communities - it creates an organisation with enough scale to realise efficiencies and transformation, while keeping a strong sense of place at the heart of local services. For further detail of the five Unitary Model, please read either the [Five Unitary Proposal Executive Summary](#) or the [Five Unitary Proposal in full](#).
13. The Council's support for the five unitary model was supported by a majority at Full Council and formalised by Cabinet. You can access full details of the council's assessment of the four proposals and its [decision to endorse the five unitary model](#).
14. In February 2026, councils in Essex submitted a [response to government on the proposed content of the Structural Changes Order](#) (SCO).
15. On 25 March 2026, the government announced its [decision for five unitary councils](#) to replace the existing county, unitary, city, district and borough councils in Greater Essex.
16. The government is working on Draft Legislation for Structural Change Order (SCO) (final draft due Spring 2026). The Structural Change Order will establish the new councils and abolish the existing councils. The Order provides the transitional arrangements, with the core of that being elections to 'shadow' councils and providing them with preparatory functions, including the preparation of budgets and plans, to enable the assumption of local

government functions and powers on 1 April 2028. It will also provide duties to implement a Leader and Cabinet model, appoint statutory officers, and adopt codes of conduct and members' allowances.

17. The government asked councils in Essex to submit further information on three areas by 29 May 2026:
  - a) Confirmation of Returning Officers for inaugural elections in each new council area
  - b) Suggested warding arrangements for each of the new councils (for inclusion in the SCO)
  - c) Current electoral cycles for parish councils in the area of each new council and preferences for how these should be aligned with the new unitary council elections.
18. For further information, please see 8.a Appendix 1 LGR UDC SCO Response (Background Papers)
19. **Confirmation of Returning Officers** - the Council's response to 17a was developed in dialogue with the Chief Executives of Harlow Council and Epping Forest District Council. The Returning Officer for the inaugural elections for West Essex Council will be Peter Holt, Chief Executive, Uttlesford District Council.
20. **Suggested warding arrangements for West Essex Council** – the Council's response to 17.b is set out in Table 1 Warding Arrangements for Uttlesford Area of West Essex Council and illustrated in Figure 1 Proposed Ward Boundaries.
21. The details of new warding arrangements for Uttlesford district area were shared with all councillors on 8 August 2025, and discussed a few days later at the councillors' briefing. The arrangements fed into the proposal for five unitary councils, which was supported by a clear majority at full Council and submitted to Government in September 2025.
22. The proposed warding arrangements set out that the area of Uttlesford within the future West Essex Council would be represented by 25 councillors. Each newly-elected West Essex Councillor would represent around 2,900 residents each, compared to an average electorate today of 1,850 voters each for the district council, and about 13,500 voters each for the county council.
23. Councillors for the future West Essex Council will be elected in May 2027 and will serve a five-year initial term, from May 2027 to 1 April 2028 as 'shadow councillors' and thereafter as West Essex councillors. It is important to note that the new warding arrangements for West Essex will only be for this first five-year term to 2032. Ahead of the 2032 elections, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) will carry out a full review of warding arrangements for the West Essex Council area.
24. In confirming the minded-to decision to create a new West Essex Council covering the Uttlesford, Epping Forest and Harlow areas, the Government also

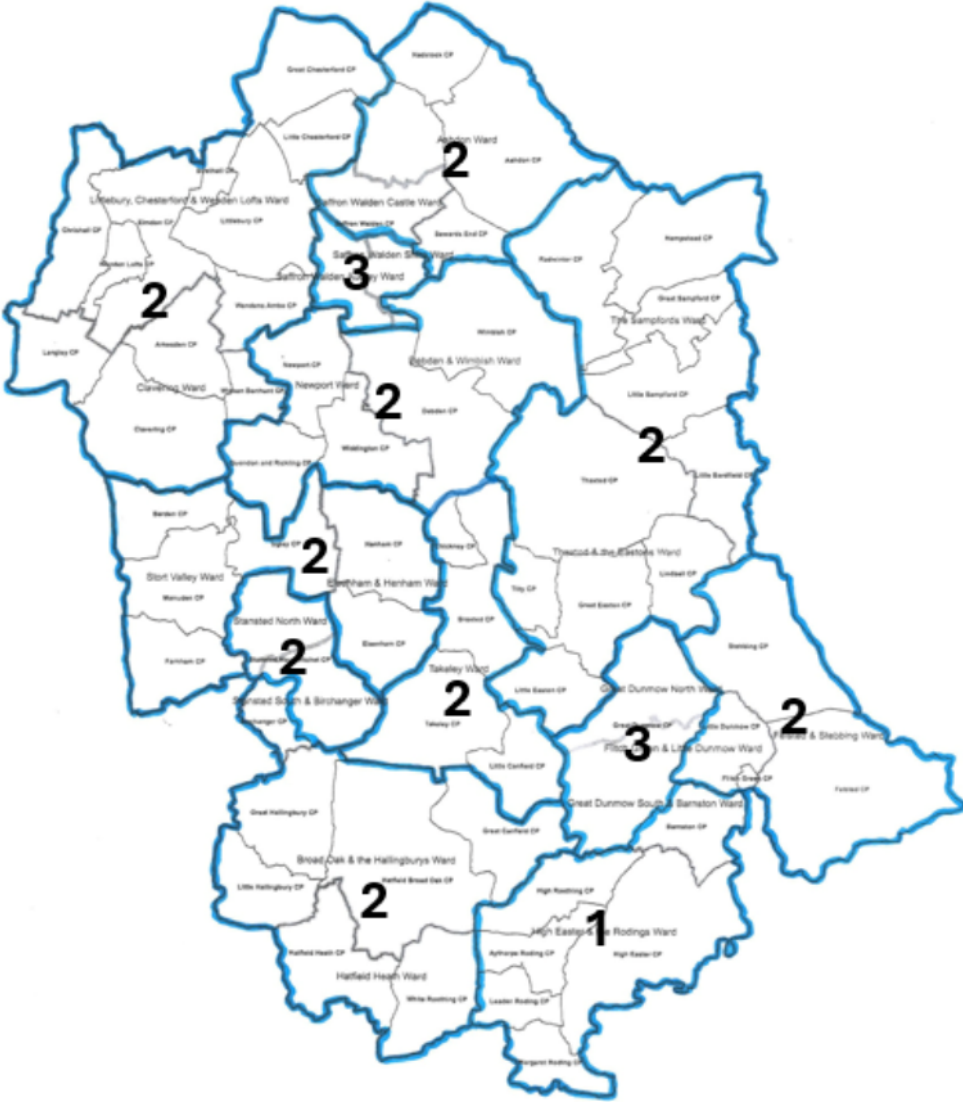
confirmed that the elections to the new unitary council will be on the basis of the ward sizes and the 25 Councillors proposed.

25. In April 2026, members of the Scrutiny Committee's LGR Task and Finish Group were provided with an overview of the proposed warding arrangements. Councillors were subsequently asked to comment on the proposed ward names.
26. On 13 May 2026, a further meeting of the Scrutiny Committee's LGR Task and Finish Group was held to enable councillors to review feedback from their colleagues. Feedback included an alternative proposal submitted by the Liberal Democrat Group focusing on the area in the South East of the current Uttlesford area. This alternative proposal exceeded the required 25 councillors and therefore was not viable for submission to government.
27. As a result of engagement with the LGR Task and Finish Group, the proposed ward names were updated as shown in Table 1 Warding Arrangements for Uttlesford Area of West Essex Council. The ward boundaries are illustrated in Figure 1 Proposed Ward Boundaries.
28. Further details of engagement on the warding arrangements is available in 8.a Appendix 1 LGR UDC SCO Response (see Background Papers)

Table 1 Warding Arrangements for Uttlesford Area of West Essex Council

Ward	Sum of Electors	No. Councillors	Variance from target no. electors per councillor
Ashdon and Saffron Walden Castle	5593	2	-3%
Chesterford and Clavering	5684	2	-1%
Debden and Newport	5135	2	-11%
Great Dunmow	9164	3	6%
Elsenham and Stort Valley	6018	2	5%
Felsted and Flich Green	5838	2	2%
Hallingbury & Hatfield	5920	2	3%
High Easter and the Rodings	2716	1	-6%
Saffron Walden Audley and Shire	9407	3	9%
Stansted Mountfitchet	6398	2	11%
Takeley	5348	2	-7%
Thaxted	5847	2	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>73068</b>	<b>25</b>	

Figure 1 Proposed Ward Boundaries



29. **Alignment of electoral cycles for parish councils in the area of West Essex Council** - the Council's response to 17.c is that Parish Council elections in the Uttlesford area of West Essex Council should take place in 2027 alongside the inaugural elections to West Essex Council. Parish Councillors elected in May 2027 should serve a five-year term so that the next Parish elections will take place in 2032 alongside the next elections to West Essex Council, and thereafter on the same four-yearly cycle. This substantially reduces the cost of elections for Parishes, where they would otherwise have to carry the full costs if not scheduled to be on the same day as West Essex Council elections.
30. The Electoral Services Manager for the Council engaged with counterparts at Epping Forest District Council and Harlow Council to discuss parish council election arrangements. The area of Harlow Council does not currently include any parishes. The area of Epping Forest District Council does include parishes. Epping Forest elect parishes in halves. The parish elections in 2027 would be for an initial 5-year term and thereafter for 4 years (as the norm) from 2032 to tie up with the new West Essex council's all out unitary elections. Parishes that are scheduled for election in 2028 could go ahead then for a 4-year term as they would then tie up.

## Risk Analysis

31.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
If the Council does not respond to the Government's request for representations, its views will not be taken into account regarding the SCO.	3	3	Respond to the Government's request for council representations on the SCO by the deadline of 29 May 2026.

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.