



REPORT of CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**to
PERFORMANCE, GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
5 JUNE 2025**

PROPOSED COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS – VARIOUS PARISHES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To receive and consider requests from various Parish / Town Councils for reviews of boundaries and electoral arrangements.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- (i) That Community Governance Reviews be instigated in line with the requests by Maldon Town Council and Heybridge Parish Council for parish boundary revisions;
- (ii) That a Community Governance Review be instigated in line with the request by Little Braxted Parish Council for an increase in its membership;
- (iii) That the Chief Executive be authorised to prepare for publication and consultation terms of reference for these proposals.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Council had begun work with the Boundary Commission for England on a District-wide electoral review, the first since 2020. In February this year however, the Boundary Commission gave notice that in view of the implications of the Government's English Devolution White Paper on its work programme and the impact on the electoral review work, its Board had decided that it would be appropriate for the review to be paused for the foreseeable future.
- 3.2 Building on the work already begun, all Parish and Town Councils were contacted to establish whether any particular issues required to be dealt with, the only alternative mechanism being through the undertaking of Community Governance Reviews under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 by the District Council. Reviews may be instigated by resolution of the District Council itself or on petition from local electors.
- 3.3 The following requests were received from Parish and Town Councils:
- **Little Braxted Parish Council**
Increase in its membership from five to six.
 - **Heybridge Parish Council**
Revision of the boundary with Great Totham to include the North Heybridge Garden Suburb wholly within the Parish of Heybridge.

- **Maldon Town Council**
Impact of new development at Maldon West in terms of parish boundary with Woodham Mortimer / Hazeleigh and the Electors:Councillors ratio / warding arrangements.
- **Wickham Bishops Parish Council**
Revision of the boundary with Great Totham to include development wholly within the Parish of Wickham Bishops.
- **Heybridge Basin Parish Council**
Revision of its parish boundary to include the properties nos. 2-10 Basin Road currently within the East Ward of the Parish of Heybridge.
- **North Fambridge Parish Council**
Increase in its membership from five to seven. The Council has already agreed to instigate a Community Governance Review for this proposal by resolution of the Committee in March 2023. The Parish Council has reaffirmed its request.

- 3.4 The boundary changes requested are intended to ensure that where new development straddles the boundary with a neighbouring Parish, the boundary is revised to encompass the development wholly within the predominant Parish. The impact of the new development at Maldon West and Heybridge West in relation to the existing Parish boundaries is clearly defined and shown on the maps attached as **APPENDICES A and B**. Where the respective boundaries are to be re-drawn precisely they will need to be considered and perhaps discussed with the Councils involved prior to terms of reference for the reviews being finalised for publication and consultation.
- 3.5 Additionally, the request by Maldon Town Council seeks a review of the impact of new development on the Elector:Councillor ratio with a view to increasing the number of Councillors and/or revising the warding arrangement. This aspect will need to be the subject of further examination and discussion with the Town Council.
- 3.6 The request from Wickham Bishops Parish Council for a boundary revision has been clarified. It is not related to accommodating new development but rather is based on a historic view as to the logic of the existing boundary. The Parish Council will therefore be giving this matter further thought in due course. No further action is proposed to be taken on the request for now.
- 3.7 Little Braxted Parish Council has requested an increase in its membership to help overcome the difficulties often encountered by operating with just five Councillors, particularly when a legal quorum for meetings is three.
- 3.8 North Fambridge Parish Council based its request on the growing size of the village. By increasing its membership, it feels that this will potentially improve diversity and provide the opportunity for a younger demographic. It observed that certain existing Councillors are now unable to carry out some of the physical duties arising from the Parish Council's responsibilities, and that an enlarged membership will assist in the distribution of responsibilities and work. The Parish Council has reaffirmed its wish to see an increase in its membership.
- 3.9 Heybridge Basin Parish Council is looking at an extension of its parish boundary to include the properties nos. 2-10 Basin Road, currently within the East Ward of the Parish of Heybridge. When the separate parish of Heybridge Basin and its Parish Council were created in 2019 the boundary was established as that which had previously formed the Basin Ward of Parish of Heybridge. Upon further engagement

with the Parish Council, it seems that this may be just one element of a wider proposal upon which local discussion and consultation needs to be progressed. For now, no further action will be taken on this request.

- 3.10 The District Council therefore needs to consider these requests and must have regard to Government advice on Community Governance Reviews. This says that the Government has made clear its commitment to Parish Councils, recognising the role such councils can play in terms of community empowerment at the local level. The 2007 Act provisions are intended to improve the development and coordination of support for citizens and community groups so that they can make the best use of empowerment opportunities.
- 3.11 The Guidance adds that in the interests of effective governance, the principal council should consider the benefits of undertaking a review of the whole of its area in one go, rather than carrying out small scale reviews in a piecemeal fashion of two or three areas. However, it is recognised that a full-scale review will not always be warranted, particularly where a review of the whole area or a significant part of the principal council's area has been carried out within the last few years. Occasionally, it may be appropriate to carry out a smaller review, for example, to adjust minor parish boundary anomalies.
- 3.12 Officer comments on these requests are as follows:
- a) It is acknowledged that the membership size for Little Braxted (as with North Fambridge) has been set at the minimum legal level along with some other Parish Councils, and that this has been so since 1974. The National Association of Local Councils has for some time advocated that the minimum membership for Parish Councils should be seven, but to date there has been no change in the law. The Council has previously decided not to broaden the scope of any review to include all Parish Councils operating at the minimum level and that each area must be considered on its own merits. There is nothing to suggest that this stance should change.
 - b) Operating at the legal minimum membership need not be an issue although there will on occasions be the potential threat to a quorum for meetings.
 - c) With regard to sharing workloads and responsibilities, this is something that can of course fluctuate over time. It is always open to a Parish Council to co-opt or bring in other persons to assist, albeit in a non-decision-making capacity.
 - d) If Community Governance Reviews are undertaken, they can be concluded to take effect in time for the next ordinary elections in May 2027.
- 3.13 Any such reviews, which would be at cost to the District Council, would involve publicity and local consultation and report back to the Council prior to a final decision. Members will be required to ensure that the community governance within the area under review will be reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area; and be effective and convenient. Section 95 of the 2007 Act provides, among other things, that when considering the number of councillors to be elected for the parish as a whole, the authority must have regard to the number of electors for the parish, and any change in that number likely to occur in the next five years. For a Parish of such a small size as Little Braxted the implications of any growth would be miniscule and therefore not a factor.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 It is concluded that there is merit in undertaking individual Community Governance Reviews in those cases which are clearly defined and ready to proceed, namely the boundary revisions in Maldon and Heybridge and the increased memberships for Little Braxted and North Fambridge. As a consequence, the previously held view that there is considered to be no requirement for a District-wide review to be undertaken still holds good.

5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025-2028

- 5.1 The undertaking of a Community Governance Review is in part a matter of compliance with the law and is also linked to the strategic priority of supporting communities in the Council's Corporate Plan.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – This may have an indirect benefit on customers in the sense that the electors of North Fambridge are residents of the District and an increase in the size of the Parish Council may be of benefit to or enhance democratic representation.
- (i) **Impact on Equalities** – Not applicable (n/a).
- (ii) **Impact on Risk (including fraud implications)** – n/a.
- (iii) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Costs associated with consultations/publicity, order-making and publication of notices etc will fall to the District Council.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Officer time to process the Review procedures.
- (v) **Impact on Devolution / Local Government Re-organisation** – None.

Background Papers: None.

Enquiries to: Doug Wilkinson, Chief Executive.