



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE**

**to
PERFORMANCE, GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
12 MARCH 2026**

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To consider and determine the outcome of the Community Governance Reviews of electoral arrangements for Little Braxted Parish Council and North Fambridge Parish Council, and revisions of parish boundaries for Heybridge Parish Council and Maldon Town Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That the Council considers the consultation responses for these Community Governance reviews;
- (ii) That subject to the Council being satisfied that the requests meet the law and associated Guidance with respect to the object of achieving effective and convenient community governance, it authorises the making of a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to:
 - A) change the parish boundary between Heybridge and Great Totham to include the North Heybridge Garden Suburb wholly within the Parish of Heybridge to be effective from the next ordinary elections in May 2027.
 - B) increase the membership of Little Braxted Parish Council from five to six Councillors, to be effective from the next ordinary elections in May 2027.
 - C) change the parish boundary between Maldon West and Woodham Mortimer & Hazleigh to include the Crest Nicholson development wholly within the Parish of Maldon West to be effective from the next ordinary elections in May 2027.
 - D) increase the membership of North Fambridge Parish Council from five to seven Councillors, to be effective from the next ordinary elections in May 2027.

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 2025 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:
- **Heybridge Parish Council**
Revision of the boundary with Great Totham to include the North Heybridge Garden Suburb wholly within the Parish of Heybridge.
 - **Little Braxted Parish Council**
Increase in its membership from five to six.
 - **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.
 - **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.
- 3.3.1 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 **APPENDIX A**.
- 3.4 Additionally, the request by Maldon Town Council sought 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.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 The Performance, Governance and Audit Committee on 5 June 2025 approved the District Council to proceed with these reviews, which 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.

3.8 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.

3.9 Officer comments on these requests were 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.

3.10 For members information, the Community Governance Review documents published for consultation are shown in **APPENDIX B**

3.11 As for the Review itself, while the law and Guidance is not specific on how the views of the electors of the area in question should be sought, the view was taken by Officers that the following steps would be sufficient and proportionate to publicise the consultation:

- The District Council's website;
- The Parish Council's website;
- The District Council's Facebook and NextDoor page;
- Essex County Council was notified (required by law).

3.12 The review terms of reference and consultation were published on 28 October 2025, with a closing date of 23 December 2025.

3.13 A total of 12 local residents and parish councils have responded, of which 10 support the proposed changes, as follows:

- Heybridge: seven responses, six in support, one not in support
- Little Braxted: no responses

- Maldon: one response not supporting, although referred more to the Present Government agenda and devolution
- North Fambridge: four responses all in support.

3.14 The Council is required to ensure that the Community Governance within the areas under review will be reflective of the identities and interests of the communities in those areas; and be effective and convenient.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 It is concluded that following the consultations, and provided that the Council is satisfied that the Parish and Town Councils request are sound in the context of the law and associated Guidance on this subject as described in paragraph 3.13, it may agree to make the necessary Re-Organisation Orders, effective from May 2027, as follows:

- **Heybridge Parish Council**
Revision of the boundary with Great Totham to include the North Heybridge Garden Suburb wholly within the Parish of Heybridge.
- **Little Braxted Parish Council**
Increase in its membership from five to six.
- **Maldon Town Council**
Revision of the boundary to account for the impact of new development at Maldon West in terms of parish boundary with Woodham Mortimer / Hazeleigh.
- **North Fambridge Parish Council**
Increase in its membership from five to seven.

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

5.1 Supporting our communities

5.1.1 Enabling parish and Town councils to have ongoing effective governance and the correct electoral areas encompassing new developments wholly within the predominant Parish.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Indirect benefit on customers in the sense that electors of these Parish and Town councils are residents of the district and an increase in the size of a Parish or Town council may be of benefit to or enhance democratic representation.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – None.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – None.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – None.

(vi) **Impact on Devolution / Local Government Reorganisation** – None.

Background Papers: None

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