



Chelmsford City Council Governance Committee

17 January 2024

Polling District and Polling Places Review 2024

Report by:

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Purpose

Members are asked to consider the following recommendations following completed of the statutory polling district and places undertaken toward the end of 2023.

Recommendations

1. The proposals outlined in this report are approved and implemented for future elections, effective from 1 February 2024.
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1. Background

- 1.1. A polling district and polling place review seeks to establish the best voting arrangements for electors within the local authority area. The statutory requirements of polling districts are set out as follows:

- Each parish must be a separate polling district unless special circumstances apply.

- Each polling district must have its own polling place. However, this does not apply if the size (or other circumstances) of a polling district means that the location of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electors.
- 1.2. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 advises of the timings for compulsory reviews of polling districts, polling places, and polling stations.
 - 1.3. The last compulsory review was undertaken in 2019 and the current review must be completed by 31 January 2025. Due to the forthcoming General Parliamentary Election, it was determined to be appropriate to complete the review as early as possible during the compulsory review period.
 - 1.4. Outside of compulsory reviews, the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) for each authority is also encouraged to conduct regular assessments of existing arrangements and in keeping with this, each venue in Chelmsford is reassessed for suitability ahead of each election. Polling station venues were most recently reviewed on this basis ahead on the 2023 City and Parish tier Council elections, taking into consideration requirements related to the Elections Act 2020, including the introduction of voter ID. In addition to this, a formal interim polling district and polling places review was considered by Governance Committee in 2022 following the Community Governance Review (CGR) to realign boundaries and venues with the new parish areas.
 - 1.5. Since the commencement of this review, the Local Government Boundary Commission has published their proposals for the Essex County Council revised boundaries, expected to be in place in 2025, and their intention to complete a review of Chelmsford City Council boundaries ahead of 2027. As a result of this, additional interim reviews are expected to be held in both 2025 and 2026/7 to ensure that all boundaries are coterminous.
 - 1.6. The arrangements agreed during this review will apply to all elections and referendums held within the local authority area.

2. Terminology

- 2.1. For the purpose of this report, it is important the following terminology is understood:
 - Polling District – an area created by the division of a constituency, ward, or division into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined that is convenient to electors.
 - Polling Place – the building or area within which a polling station is situated.

- Polling Station – the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place.

3. The Review Process

Commencement of review and Initial Consultation

- 3.1. This review commenced on Friday 27 October and an initial consultation was opened. A public notice was published locally and advertised on our website inviting comments regarding the existing polling district boundaries and polling station venues.
- 3.2. Parish Councils, elected Councillors and MPs, local charities, and disability organisations, were all directly invited to comment on the review, alongside others. A full list of invited consultees is outlined in Appendix 1.
- 3.3. During the first stage of the consultation, we received a total of 18 responses summarised below (full responses detailed in Appendix 1):
 - Nine responses were from local Councillors, three were from Parish tier councils, four were representatives from schools and two were from an interested member of the public.
 - Nine responses indicated support for the existing arrangements in their relevant areas.
 - Two responses related to parliamentary or local government boundary reviews, which the City Council does not hold the power to consider.
- 3.4. Of the responses received at this stage, seven suggested changes to the existing arrangements. Five of these related to the use of schools which will be addressed in more detail during the report. One addressed the closure of the village hall in West Hanningfield, which is also addressed in this report.
- 3.5. Runwell Parish Council suggested allowing some residents in Runwell East Polling District to use the Polling Station allocated to Runwell St Luke's (Runwell Sports and Social Centre). This was not considered good practise at this stage as this venue was only allocated to polling in 2022 and may not have the space to accommodate the double polling station that would be required to host two electoral areas. This may be considered again at the next review when the arrangements are better established.

Acting Returning Officers Initial Recommendations and secondary consultation

- 3.6. The AROs initial recommendations were published on 24 November 2023. This commenced a secondary consultation on the recommendations made.
- 3.7. The recommendations focussed on 10 of the 90 polling districts in the area where alternative options or concerns were raised either at the recent elections or during the initial consultation. These recommendations were developed with the support of the Constitutional Working Group. The assessments and recommendations made at this stage can be summarised as:
- Proposal A – Chelmsford County High School for Girls to remain the allocated polling district for The Avenues polling district, unless an agreement can be made with Chelmer Housing Partnership (CHP) for a venue under their management to be used.
 - Proposal B – North Avenue Youth Centre should remain the polling station for Boarded Barns as the access concerns have been resolved by the closure of the café.
 - Proposal C – Collingwood Primary School to remain the polling station for Collingwood as it is not suitable for the polling place in the neighbouring polling district to host 4 polling stations.
 - Proposal D - Larkrise Primary School to remain the allocated polling district for Dorset Avenue polling district, unless an agreement can be made with CHP for a venue under their management to be used.
 - Proposal E – Life Church to remain the allocated polling station for Golday district, with the use of the City Council’s parkway car park for free for voters travelling by car.
 - Proposal F – Mildmay Junior School to remain the allocated polling station for this area until the renovations on Tile Kiln Church are complete.
 - Proposal G – polling in North Melbourne to return to North Melbourne Community Centre following relocation to the library due to temporary closure of the community centre.
 - Proposal H – West Hanningfield Temple Grove and West Hanningfield Village polling districts to be merged with the allocated polling station being St Peters Primary School, following the closure of the village hall.
 - Proposal I – St John Payne Catholic School to remain the allocated polling station for Woodhall, with additional staff appointed to manage the site, particularly the car park, around peak hours.
- 3.8. Six responses were received at this stage of the consultation:
- One response was submitted in support of Proposal A from Chelmsford Labour Party and for Proposal H from St Peters Primary School.
 - Two responses were received in opposition to Proposal H, from a local Councillor and the Parish Council, and one in opposition to Proposal D, from Larkrise School.

- An additional response was submitted in support of the existing arrangements for elsewhere in Chelmsford.
- 3.9. It is a requirement of the review that the ARO for any Parliamentary elections also engage with polling district reviews. We have received responses from the ARO for both Maldon and North West Essex constituencies supporting the proposed arrangements and raising no concern.

4. Outcome of the review and proposed changes

- 4.1. Following assessment of the responses received during the secondary consultation the initial recommendations have been reconsidered. The final recommendations contain only a partial change to proposal H. The full recommendations and analysis can be found in Appendix 2.

Revised recommendations for Proposal H

- 4.2. Following consideration of the comments received opposing the merging of the two polling districts in West Hanningfield and that the new polling venue has not yet been tested it is not recommended that this change is advanced at this stage. The parish council in particular raised concerns regarding potential disenfranchisement of voters and access concerns, which would be considered a significant risk at the upcoming parliamentary election. Local knowledge of the area appears to have demonstrated that transport links between the areas is not as efficient as first understood.
- 4.3. The reallocation of the polling station for West Hanningfield Village from the village hall to St Peter's Primary School remains the only recommendation for this area, as the village hall is no longer in operation.
- 4.4. It is suggested that the consideration to merge these polling districts is reconsidered in 2025, once the school is an established polling venue and direct engagement with local residents can be achieved. This is because the existing concerns regarding space and suitability concerns related to the use of temporary venues cannot yet be fully satisfied.

Use of schools for polling

- 4.5. The ARO acknowledges that the use of schools and other educational institutions can be disruptive to the community and pose an inconvenience to parents for the day of poll. With this in mind, schools are always used for polling when all other options have been considered and deemed unacceptable.

- 4.6. It is not always possible to locate alternative venues to host polling, for various reasons. This may be due to a lack of venues within the district or concerns regarding the size of the space available in relation to the electorate, and accessibility for electors with mobility issues.
- 4.7. The following educational institutions were used as polling places for the May 2023 elections and, unless mentioned elsewhere in this report, are intended to remain the designated polling place for their respective district:
- Barnes Farm Junior School
 - Chelmer Valley High School (remained open to students)
 - Chelmsford County High School for Girls (remained open to students)
 - Collingwood Primary School
 - Galleywood Infants School (remained open to students)
 - Larkrise Primary School
 - Mildmay Junior School (remained partially open to students)
 - Springfield Primary School
 - St John Payne Catholic School (remained open to students)
 - The Tyrrells Primary School (remained open to students)
 - Westlands Community Primary School

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. This review has determined that the current arrangements for polling across the local authority area have been effective at recent polls and that there is no need for any amendments at this time, other than those outlined in proposal H due to the closure of West Hanningfield Village Hall.
- 5.2. The polling arrangements across Chelmsford have been and will continue to be reviewed outside of the compulsory review timetable, thus making each review more targeted and efficient.
- 5.3. Members are requested to consider the information provided in this report and its appendices for implementation of the outcome on the published register on 1 February 2024.

List of appendices:

Appendix 1 Responses from the initial stage of the public consultation and list of consultees invited to comment.

Appendix 2 Final recommendations of the Acting Returning Officer

Background papers:

Electoral Commission Guidance for conducting polling district and polling place reviews:
www.electoralcommission.org.uk/reviews-polling-districts-polling-places-and-polling-stations

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional: As set out in the report.

Financial: None

Potential impact on climate change and the environment: None

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030: None.

Personnel: None

Risk Management: None

Equality and Diversity: As set out in the report.

(For new or revised policies or procedures has an equalities impact assessment been carried out? If not, explain why)

Health and Safety: As set out in the report.

Digital: None.

Other: None.

Consultees:

As listed at Appendix 1 of this report.

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

None.

Initial consultation responses

Respondent	Ward	Polling Districts	Polling District comment	Polling Station comment
Parish Councillor	Little Baddow, Danbury and Sandon	Sandon/Howe Green	Howe Green polling district boundaries are effective	Sandon Village Hall is an appropriate polling station
Mildmay Junior School	Goat Hall	Mildmay	N/A	As the Headteacher of the School, I recognise that the law allows for the electoral services to require use of the school facilities - however, hosting polling cannot be done in a way that ensures that all the children are effectively safeguarded from access by members of the general public. On the last occasion that we acted as polling host, 270 children (Reception to Year 2) were unable to attend school for the day leading to 1620 lost hours of education. This is also a considerable inconvenience to the families of these 270 children.
Collingwood Primary School	SWF - Chetwood and Collingwood	Collingwood	Chetwood and The Village Hall are closer to the school than the distance between polling stations in other areas therefore using a school (and using only 1 of the schools in the town) is inequitable and very disruptive to pupils education. Everywhere in South Woodham Ferrers is less than a 10 min walk away.	The Village Hall or Chetwood Centre....South Woodham Ferrers is too small a town to need so many wards - could they be merged?
Parish Councillor	Broomfield and The Walthams	Little Waltham	Little Waltham polling district boundaries are effective	Little Waltham Memorial Hall is well located and there is ample parking
Member of the public	Bicknacre and East and West Hanningfield	West Hanningfield Village	Combine South Hanningfield Ward with West Hanningfield especially now that West Hanningfield are unable to use the hall in the village.	South Hanningfield Village Hall is accessible with ample parking
Parish Councillor	Boreham and the Leighs		N/A	Leighs Village Hall is an appropriate polling station
Springfield Primary School	Springfield North	Nabbots Farm	N/A	450 children are disrupted when school has to close - suggested using community centre around the corner

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Member of the public	Galleywood	N/A	I live in Galleywood Chelmsford I am disgusted that we are now no longer considered chelmsford and put with Maldon.	Galleywood Infants School is an appropriate polling station
City Councillor	South Hanningfield, Stock and Margaretting	Ramsden Heath	N/A	Ramsden Heath Christian Growth Centre is an appropriate polling station
City Councillor	South Hanningfield, Stock and Margaretting	Downham	N/A	Downham Village Hall is an appropriate polling station
City Councillor	South Hanningfield, Stock and Margaretting	South Hanningfield	N/A	South Hanningfield Village Hall is an appropriate polling station
City Councillor	Great Baddow West	Dorset Avenue	N/A	Larkrise School - There is no ramp into the school hall by the entrance used. Although the step is quite shallow it is a trip hazard. Essex Dance Theatre would avoid school closure but I understand the cost implication on protecting the dance floor.
City Councillor	Chelmer Village and Beaulieu Park	N/A	Chelmer Village which incorporates Chancellor Park with Beaulieu Park is too big. Chelmer Village incorporating Chancellor Park should be a single ward.	N/A
City Councillor	SWF - Elmwood and Woodville	Elmwood	N/A	Champions Manor Hall is an appropriate polling station
Parish Council	Chelmsford Rural West	Good Easter		Good Easter Village Hall is an appropriate polling station
St John Payne School	Patching Hall	Woodhall		The issue has been raised very strongly previously and we were forced to be polling station in May which was hugely disruptive to the school and compromised our security and safeguarding responsibilities. Suggested local Primary schools or community spaces where impact would be less disruptive.
Parish Council	Rettendon and Runwell	Runwell East/Runwell St Luke's	Parts of Runwell East are adjacent to Runwell St.luke's, the ability to share the polling station at the Sports and Social Club would be helpful	N/A
Parish Council	Rettendon and Runwell	Runwell East and West	N/A	Runwell Village Hall is an appropriate polling station

Secondary consultation responses

Respondent	Ward	Proposal	Response to proposal	Comments
Parish Council	Bicknacre and East and West Hanningfield	Other - Bicknacre and Woodham Ferrers	N/A	No issues with either polling station
School	Great Baddow West	Proposal D - Dorset Avenue - CEA	I do not support this proposal	The school being used as a polling station is very disruptive to the learning of the students, and is disruptive to parents who work and have to take a day off to look after their children. Please find an alternative venue.
School	Bicknacre and East and West Hanningfield	Proposal H - West Hanningfield Village - MAE and West Hanningfield Temple Grove - MAD	I support this proposal	Whilst the staff and Governors at St Peter's understand the importance of their pupils attending school as much as possible to allow them to flourish in every way, we also understand the important position the school holds in the local community. With the Village Hall no longer a suitable option then the school has a responsibility to serve the local community and allow its building to be used as a polling station until the time comes that there may be a more suitable option. The school will work alongside the local council to make sure this process causes limited disruption to the running of the school. However, it is noted that for the school to be used as a polling station, it will need to be closed to pupils on that day. The school will communicate this to its community as soon as any polling dates are agreed by the government.
Political Party	Patching Hall	Proposal A - The Avenues - CJB	I support this proposal	None
City Councillor	Bicknacre and East and West Hanningfield	Proposal H - West Hanningfield Village - MAE and West Hanningfield Temple Grove - MAD	I support this proposal in part	In view of the village hall no longer being available it is sensible to use the school instead. However, a significant proportion of West Hanningfield's residents reside in the Bakers Lane area and many are elderly who do not have use of transport - and because of the geography of the area it is impossible to get to West Hanningfield village by public transport. I would therefore prefer if voting arrangements can continue to be made in the Bakers Lane area.
Parish Council	Bicknacre and East and West Hanningfield	Proposal H - West Hanningfield Village - MAE	I do not support this proposal	There is no issue with moving the polling station currently at the village hall to the school. However, to remove the polling station in Bakers Lane is extremely inadvisable. There are two park homes in Bakers Lane which

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		and West Hanningfield Temple Grove - MAD		comprise c.43% of the population of the Parish. Residents are, by their own admission elderly and/or infirm, and many do not drive and the bus service infrequent. I have no doubt that 'turn-out' would be severely impacted if the Bakers Lane polling station was removed... I would even recommend that two portacabins be installed - one in each park home estate. This is because the state of the lane is such that pavements are degraded and all street lamps are not working. Both issues have been reported to Highways (including the cabinet Member for Highways at ECC) but there is no urgency to effect the repairs.
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Responses from AROs for Parliamentary elections

Maldon ARO

"We have no comments or concerns over this or the suggestions for the changes in West Hanningfield."

North West Essex ARO

"The polling places overall seem fine. I have just raised a query over the Ford End polling place and raised a comment on some rooms that would be used as the polling station just so it will be clear for the electorate and to ensure we use the most appropriately sized room for voting."

Full list of consultees invited to comment

Age UK	John Whittingdale MP (Maldon)	Pleshey Parish Council	Chetwood Childrens Centre
Alzheimer's Society	Kemi Badenoch MP (Uttlesford)	Rettendon Parish Council	Moulsham High Youth Centre
Age Concern	Vicky Ford MP (Chelmsford)	Roxwell Parish Council	Barnes Farm Junior School
City of Chelmsford Mencap	Boreham Parish Council	Runwell Parish Council	Beehive Lane Community School
SAFE	Broomfield Parish Council	Sandon Parish Council	Chelmer Valley High School
Deafblind UK (Essex)	Chelmsford Garden Community Council	South Hanningfield Parish Council	Chelmsford County High School
Essex Community Foundation	Chelmer Village Council	South Woodham Ferrers Parish Council	Collingwood Primary School
Essex Police	Chignal Parish Council	Springfield Parish Council	Columbus School and College
Interact	Danbury Parish Council	Stock Parish Council	Galleywood Infants School
Limbless Association	East Hanningfield Parish Council	West Hanningfield Parish Council	Larkrise Primary School
Priory Group	Galleywood Parish Council	Woodham Ferrers and Bicknacre Parish Council	Mildmay Junior School
Purple	Good Easter Parish Council	Writtle Parish Council	Springfield Primary School
SANCTUS	Great and Little Leighs Parish Council	The Conservative Party	St. John Payne Catholic School
The Change Project	Great Baddow Parish Clerk	Liberal Democrats	The Tyrells Primary School
The Samaritans	Great Waltham Parish Council	Labour Party	Trinity Road Primary School
Anglia Ruskin University	Highwood Parish Council	Green Party	Westlands Community Primary School
Police Fire and Crime Commissioner	Little Baddow Parish Council	South Woodham Ferrers Taxpayers Taxpayers Association	Writtle University College
Chelmsford City Council Councillors (all)	Little Waltham Parish Council	The Brexit Party	Anglia Ruskin University
Essex County Council Councillors (Chelmsford, Maldon, NWE)	Margaretting Parish Council	United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	



Polling District and Polling Places Review 2023-2024

In accordance with Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 Chelmsford City Council is currently carrying out a review of polling districts and polling places within the City of Chelmsford.

The purpose of the review is to seek to ensure that:

- all electors in the city have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
- so far as reasonably practicable, the polling places in the city are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.

The following Guidelines are also recognised as good practice, but may not always be obtainable:

- Suitable transport links within the polling district and conveniently located for the polling place.
- Polling place's ability to accommodate additional seating or more than one polling station.
- Premises readily available in the event of unscheduled elections.
- A polling station should not be allocated an electorate of greater than 2,500 electors. In these circumstances, double polling stations can be adopted within the polling place.

Chelmsford currently has 90 polling districts within the local authority boundaries. They remain the same for all types of elections.

This report outlines the Acting Returning Officer for Chelmsford's initial proposals for amendments to the current polling arrangements. These recommendations will be reviewed and updated with comments from the Acting Returning Offices of the Maldon and Saffron Walden/Northwest Essex districts following the close of the consultation period.

Comments on the proposals are invited until 15 December 2023. All comments will then be considered, and a report with any recommendations for changes to the current arrangements will be presented to Governance Committee 17 January 2024. That Committee has been delegated with the decision-making power to approve any changes by full Council.

Comments and representations may be submitted as follows:

By post	Electoral Services, Chelmsford City Council, Civic Centre, Duke Street, Chelmsford CM1 1JE
By completing the online form	www.chelmsford.gov.uk/voting-and-elections/Polling-district-review-2024/

All representations must be received no later than 15 December 2023.

The final amendments will be implemented on the electoral register on 1 February 2024; any election called before that date would be delivered under the current arrangements.

A map outlining the current arrangements and the initial proposals can be viewed on our website at the following link:

- [Polling Station Review \(arcgis.com\)](http://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/voting-and-elections/Polling-district-review-2024/)

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Terminology

Polling District The area created by the division of a constituency, ward, or division into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined as convenient to electors.

Polling Place The building, site, or location where the polling station is situated.

Polling Station The room or area within the polling place where voting takes place.

Double Station Where 2 polling stations are located in the same polling place, normally in the same room.

Key Dates

Timetable	
27 October 2023	Formal notice of review
24 November 2023	Publication of (Acting) Returning Officer's comments
15 December 2023	End of consultation period
17 January 2024	Final proposals presented to Governance Committee
1 February 2024	Publish revised register of electors

Polling districts and polling places under review

This report focuses on polling places and polling districts where matters have been raised by election staff and members the public, or where an alternative venue can be identified. Those not mentioned in this report were deemed suitable with no need for further assessment.

Proposal A - The Avenues – CJB

Polling Station: Chelmsford County High School for Girls

City ward: Patching Hall

Total electorate September 2023: 3268

Electorate difference since last review: - 128

The Chelmsford County High School for Girls (CCHS) is a double polling station situated to the south of the polling district, accessed via Broomfield Road, the main route through the polling district to the city centre.

CCHS was used as a polling station in May 2023 following the closure of the City of Chelmsford Church building located on Broomfield Road. No other venues have previously been identified within the area that may be able to accommodate polling.

CCHS is walkable for the majority of electors, and there are good bus routes along Broomfield Road. Parking at the school is limited. Spaces may be made available for electors with mobility issues and other electors are encouraged to park in the council owned Rectory Lane car park free of charge (for voting purposes only).

As part of this review, the Council have approached the City of Chelmsford Church who have confirmed that the church remains closed as a result of safety issues and has been earmarked for development.

A room within Anglia Ruskin University campus was considered. This was not deemed appropriate due to being outside of the polling district and the requirement for some electors to walk around 1 mile or through poorly lit paths.

Chelmer Housing Partnership (CHP) have also been approached to establish whether they have a suitable venue within the district that may be able to accommodate polling. This is currently being assessed.

Proposal:

If an agreement can be made for a suitable venue managed by CHP to be used for polling, this may be allocated as the polling place for this polling district. Should this not be achievable, CCHS must remain the designated polling place.

1 response was received during the consultation in support of this proposal.

Proposal B - Boarded Barns – CFA

Polling Station: North Avenue Youth Centre

City ward: Marconi

Total electorate September 2023: 1763 (170 absent voters)

Electorate difference since last review: -519

Following the May 2023 elections, the Presiding Officer challenged the suitability of the polling station due to through traffic from various groups using the other rooms at the site.

On discussion with representatives from North Avenue Youth Centre, the Council has been advised that the community café, which shared the location, has since closed; mitigating concerns raised at the prior election.

The 8th Chelmsford Scout Hut is situated on the western edge of the polling district and has sufficient parking and a good size hall. The scout hut has been approached and the Council are currently awaiting a response.

Proposal:

That North Avenue Youth Centre remain the designated polling place for this polling district.

No responses received during the consultation related to this proposal.

Proposal C - Collingwood – MEB

Polling Station: Collingwood Primary School

City ward: South Woodham Ferrers – Chetwood and Collingwood

Total electorate September 2023: 3089 (422 absent voters)

Electorate difference since last review: -168

Collingwood Primary School is a double polling station situated centrally to the populated area of the Collingwood polling district and a short walk from bus routes along Broughton Road. No other venues have previously been identified within the area that may be able to accommodate polling.

There were no concerns raised by Presiding Officers allocated to this polling station at the May 2023 elections; however, the Returning Officer is aware that a minority of electors attended their previous polling place despite being advised of the change on their polling cards. This is not considered unusual when the polling station has recently been relocated.

The previous arrangement of four polling stations at the Chetwood Centre was considered unsuitable following administrative issues and confusion from electors on polling day. A suitable alternative within the polling district has not been identified.

Proposal:

That Collingwood Primary School remain the designated polling place for this polling district.

No responses received during the consultation related to this proposal.

Proposal D - Dorset Avenue – CEA

Polling Station: Larkrise Primary School

City ward: Great Baddow West

Total electorate September 2023: 2220 (307 absent voters)

Electorate difference since last review: -129

Larkrise Primary School is situated toward the East of the polling district and central to the populated area. It shares a site with Essex Dance Theatre and Woodcroft Nursery. No other venues have previously been identified within the area that may be able to accommodate polling.

Access is from Dorset Avenue. There are good public transport connections with high footfall during peak hours.

A classroom at the entrance to the site was allocated as the polling station in 2019, allowing the school to remain open. Due to a change of use, the polling station reallocated to the main hall requiring the school to close.

A dance studio within Essex Dance Theatre was used as a polling station in 2021, with access through the grounds of Larkrise Primary School. A member of staff was required to monitor the entrance to ensure that the school and nursery remained secure. The studio was closed for three days to allow for the instillation of temporary flooring. This was costly and resulted in access and suitability concerns.

Chelmer Housing Partnership (CHP) have been approached to establish whether they have a suitable venue within the district that could accommodate polling. This is currently being assessed.

Proposal:

That Larkrise Primary School remain the polling place for this polling district, where the ARO and CHP cannot identify a suitable alternative.

A response was received from Larkrise school in opposition to this proposal, suggesting that another venue was found. Unfortunately, no improved alternatives were suggested.

Proposal E - Goldlay – CGB

Polling Station: Life Church

City ward: Moulsham and Central

Total electorate September 2023: 2666 (439 absent voters)

Electorate difference since last review: -159

Located in the North of the residential area, the Life Church has issues with access due to being located off the busy Moulsham Street. There are no facilities for parking, however, parking can be made available for free in the council owned parkway car park.

The polling station for this polling district has been relocated twice for unscheduled polls to neighbouring polling districts; to Dovedale Sports Centre (St John's) and to Essex Youth Centre (Central). As there are suitable venues within the polling district, no further consideration is given to these venues at this time.

St John's Church (South of the polling district) and Chelmsford Mencap (Central to the polling district) have been approached and the Council are currently awaiting a response.

Proposal:

That the Life Church remain the polling place for this polling district.

No responses received during the consultation related to this proposal.

Proposal F - Mildmay – CCA

Polling Station: Mildmay Junior School

City ward: Goat Hall

Total electorate September 2023: 2859 (386 absent voters)

Electorate difference since last review: -160

Mildmay Junior School is situated in a built-up area to the North-East of the polling district.

Access to the polling station is through the main reception, with sufficient parking at the shops a short walk from the school. The school has agreed to allocate several parking spaces for electors with mobility issues. There are good bus routes within the area.

As Mildmay Junior School hosts a double station, alternatives such as the breakfast room and other classrooms are not suitable due to the size and concerns over access to the polling station. It was agreed that the school hall remained the most suitable location as it would cause the least disruption, with affected year groups being able to work remotely.

Tile Kiln Church is well located within the area and has previously been used to serve this polling district but was considered no longer appropriate at the last review. Work is currently being undertaken at the site and representatives have advised that the venue may be bookable for polling following completion of these works in Spring/Summer 2024.

Proposal:

Mildmay Primary School remain the polling station for this polling district, until the work is completed at the church, at which point the situation should be reviewed.

No responses received during the consultation related to this proposal.

Proposal G - North Melbourne – CLA

Polling Station: Newlands Spring Community Centre

City ward: St Andrews

Total electorate September 2023: 1292 (167 absent voters)

Electorate difference since last review: -42

Newland Spring Community Hall is situated just South-East of the polling district. There is ample parking nearby, bus routes along Copperfield Road, and the polling place is within walking distance for the majority of electors.

The community hall was not used as a polling place for the May 2023 elections due to a requirement for renovations. North Melbourne Library was used as an alternate location. The community centre is now open to the public again.

Proposal:

The polling station returns to Newlands Spring Community Centre.

No responses received during the consultation related to this proposal.

Proposal H - West Hanningfield Village – MAE and West Hanningfield Temple Grove - MAD

Polling Station: West Hanningfield Village Hall

City ward: Bicknacre and East and West Hanningfield

Total electorate September 2023: MAE 513 (62 absent voters) / MAD 387 (49 absent voters)

Electorate difference since last review: MAE -51 / MAD -45

The current polling place for polling district MAE serves the electors of West Hanningfield Village is the Village Hall, a well-located community hub. However, the parish council has advised that the village hall is closed for an undetermined duration, potentially permanently.

Two venues were considered as the new polling place for this polling district, St Peter's School and St Mary and St Edward Church. Following site visits, it was determined that the school would be a more suitable venue due to accessibility, layout, and parking concerns at the church.

It is acknowledged that use of the hall would result in the school closing for the day, with the scheduling of non-pupil days, as restricting access for students could be problematic. This would, however, allow space to be allocated for elector parking within the staff carpark.

It was considered to merge the 2 polling districts in West Hanningfield, with polling for both areas being held in St Peters School. This was due to access, logistical and cost concerns related to the use of temporary venues. These concerns have been increased following the introduction of voter ID and other measures under the Elections act 2020.

With the provision of additional resources and staff it is possible to ensure that the portacabin can be made accessible for all voters, including those with disabilities and those that require additional support with ID checks. However, it must be acknowledged that these arrangements are not considered best practice.

During the consultation, both a ward councillor and the parish council raised concerns regarding this proposal and fears that it would result in residents in this area choosing not to participate in elections, mainly due to the proximity of the venue and lack of access to transport. With this in mind, the ARO is opting not to proceed with this proposal at this time, with the aim to review the situation after the upcoming elections, once the school has become an established venue and more engagement can be sought directly with local residents to communicate the options.

Proposal:

Polling districts MAE and MAD remain separate with the polling venues being St Peters Primary School and a temporary portacabin.

Proposal I - Woodhall – CJA

Polling Station: St John Payne Catholic School

City ward: Patching Hall

Total electorate September 2023: 3280 (507 absent voters)

Electorate difference since last review: -126

St John Payne Catholic School is a double polling station situated in the South of the polling district.

The hall is situated to the East of the site with access from the north via Patching Hall Lane. Access to the hall is through secure gates, and it can be separated from the main school using fencing. Due to the size of the electorate, a double polling station is required for the area which the hall can comfortably accommodate.

Parking has been made available for electors; however, the carpark is used by staff during the school's opening hours limiting available parking for the electorate. Concerns were raised by the school at recent elections due to the disruption in the school car park.

The only other venue that had been identified as possibly being able to accommodate polling in the area is the Congregation of Yahweh. The Council have approached the organisation to discuss this further but have not been able to open discussions.

The Acting Returning Officer is sympathetic to St John Payne Catholic Schools' disinclination to be used as a polling place and acknowledge feedback from the school on any potential disruption caused. The ARO is unable to consider alternate polling places until a response has been received from other venues within the polling district.

Proposal:

St John Payne School remain the allocated polling place for this district.

The Returning Officer shall arrange additional staff to help monitor the car park and outside area during peak times.

No responses received during the consultation related to this proposal.

Further information

Educational institutions and other publicly funded sites

The ARO acknowledge that the use of schools and other educational institutions can be disruptive to the community and pose an inconvenience to parents for the day of poll.

It is not always possible to locate alternative venues to host polling, for various reasons. This may be due to a lack of venues within the district or concerns regarding the size of the space available in relation to the electorate, and accessibility for electors with mobility issues.

The following educational institutions were used as polling places for the May 2023 elections and, unless mentioned elsewhere in this report, are intended to remain the designated polling place for their respective district:

- Barnes Farm Junior School
- Chelmer Valley High School
- Chelmsford County High School for Girls
- Chetwood Childrens Centre
- Collingwood Primary School
- Galleywood Infants School
- Larkrise Primary School
- Mildmay Junior School
- Moulsham High Youth Centre
- Springfield Primary School
- St John Payne Catholic School
- The Tyrrells Primary School
- Westlands Community Primary School

Relevant legislation

- Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
- The Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
- Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)

Relevant links

- [Polling District Review 2024 \(chelmsford.gov.uk\)](https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk)
- [Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations \(electoralcommission.org.uk\)](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)