



## **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	<a href="http://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/voting-and-elections/Polling-district-review-2024/">www.chelmsford.gov.uk/voting-and-elections/Polling-district-review-2024/</a>

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 \(arccgis.com\)](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.

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.

**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 8<sup>th</sup> 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.

#### 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.

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.

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.

#### 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.

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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

The current polling place for electors in West Hanningfield – Temple Grove (MAD) is a temporary portacabin installed in the layby of Bakers Lane. This has been used for a number of years as there are no appropriate venues in the area to accommodate polling. However, the use of portacabins for polling carries a number of safety, access and logistical concerns for both staff and electors.

There are good transport connections between Temple Grove and West Hanningfield Village, with regular bus routes and a car journey taking around 5 minutes. and car journeys taking around five minutes.

### **Proposal:**

Polling districts MAE and MAD should be merged to create one polling district, West Hanningfield – MAD, with St Peter's school allocated as the polling place.

### **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.

**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.

Unfortunately, alternative venues are not always suitable for use as a polling station for various reasons. This could include the location of an alternate venue, 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://chelmsford.gov.uk/polling-district-review-2024)
- [Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations \(electoralcommission.org.uk\)](https://electoralcommission.org.uk/reviews-of-polling-districts-polling-places-and-polling-stations)