

Great Waltham Parish Council

Response to Survey - Local Government Reorganisation in Greater Essex – July 2025

Section 1: About you and your local area

1. What is your role in the community?

(If you would like to respond in more than one capacity, please complete a separate survey for each.)

* required*

As a district, borough or county councillor.

Business

Parish/Town council

Public services worker (for example, council, NHS, police, fire, ambulance services)

Resident

Voluntary or community sector organisation

Other, for example, school, health provider, police, housing association etc. (please specify)

2. Which Essex area do you live or work in?

Chelmsford

3. How familiar are you with the proposed changes to local councils in Greater Essex?

Very familiar

Somewhat familiar

Not very familiar

Not at all familiar

Don't know

Section 2: About your local area

You may live in a single unitary or two-tier council area – all of these will be affected by Local Government Reorganisation. Whilst it is too early to know exactly how individual services might change, our services will still be delivered, and we will still be here for those that need us most.

4. How would you define your local area?* required*

The immediate area I live in (5-10 minutes' walk)

My local town, city or village

My district/part of Essex

Essex as a whole

Don't know

Something else (please specify)

Our parish

5. How important are the following to you?* required*

Accessible information available on council services and councillors

Very important

Fairly important

Neither important or unimportant

Not very important

Not important at all

Clear accountability on decision making and spending

Very important

Fairly important

Neither important or unimportant

Not very important

Not important at all

Efficient use of Council Tax and public funds

Very important

Fairly important

Neither important or unimportant

Not very important

Not important at all

Having a physical council office in your local area

Very important

Fairly important

Neither important or unimportant

Not very important

Not important at all

Improving the quality of council services

Very important

Fairly important

Neither important or unimportant

Not very important

Not important at all

Prioritising services for the most vulnerable

Very important

Fairly important

Neither important or unimportant

Not very important

Not important at all

Reducing bureaucracy

Very important

Fairly important

Neither important or unimportant

Not very important

Not important at all

Staff and councillors know and understand your area

Very important

Fairly important

Neither important or unimportant

Not very important

Not important at all

Representation and participation of all communities in decision making

Very important

Fairly important

Neither important or unimportant

Not very important

Not important at all

Supporting local businesses and community organisations

Very important

Fairly important

Neither important or unimportant

Not very important

Not important at all

6. This is a list of council services provided by local councils. Which of them have you, or someone living in your home, used at least once in the last year? It doesn't matter if you haven't used all the things listed for each service - please tick a service, if you have used any of the things included.* required*

Community (such as libraries, museums, parks or playgrounds, shows or fun days, activities for young people or families)

Economic development (such as for local businesses, grant funding, supporting local attractions, tourism)

Education (such as for school admissions or transport or special educational needs)

Environmental (such as rubbish collection, recycling centres, street cleaning, environmental protection, cost(sic?)/flood protection, getting rid of pests)

Planning and building (such as planning applications, planning enforcement, building control/safety, protecting old buildings, local development plans, affordable housing)

Public health (such as drug or alcohol dependency support, health improvement programmes, sexual health services)

Regulatory functions (such as trading standards, licensing (taxis, alcohol), food safety inspections, noise complaints, Council Tax, registering a birth, death or marriage)

Road transport and infrastructure (such as local road repairs, pavement/footpath repairs, street lights, public toilets and car parks)

Social care and support (such as adult social care, children's social services, safeguarding, support to vulnerable people, homelessness prevention)

None of the above

Section 3: About the creation of new unitary councils

Future councils across Greater Essex must serve bigger areas than they do today.

Several councils are working together to propose five new unitary councils in Greater Essex, with each new unitary council serving somewhere between 326,000 and 510,000 residents. Some councils are working on different proposals, expected to propose fewer councils across Greater Essex, serving bigger populations than this.

7. How much do you support the proposal to form five new unitary councils which would each serve between 326k and 510k people? * required*

Strongly support

Support

Neutral

Do not support

Strongly do not support

8. What are the top five priorities for you regarding council services? (choose up to five)* required*

Balancing cost savings to make sure existing local services are not disrupted

Creating a new council with existing neighbouring councils that are near to you geographically

Maintaining civic traditions

Maintaining existing services that are based on local needs

Maintaining local identity, cultural and historic importance

More efficiencies and potentially reduce costs

More joined-up public services

Simpler council structures

9. Thinking about how you would like your new local council to be run, what are your top five priorities? (choose up to five):* required*

Access to local representation/councillors to get my voice heard

Availability of business support

Council structures that are simple and easy to understand

Ease of contacting your local council

Funding and other support for voluntary and community organisations

High quality services that work well

How much Council Tax I pay

Impact on the local community and local identity

Infrastructure planning (e.g. roads, schools, health)

Knowing who to contact when I have a query or complaint

Local councils that are accountable to residents

Maintaining or improving local services and council-owned facilities, such as community centres, sports grounds, art centres, museums etc.

Regularly engaging with local residents about what they need and want

Value for money

10. Please tell us if you have any additional thoughts about the changes that could come with the creation of 5 new unitary councils.

These responses are made on behalf of Great Waltham Parish Council, rather than an anonymous individual.

Although several models are currently under consideration, this survey assumes that five unitary councils will be created. For the avoidance of doubt, we do not yet have sufficient information to support either the model proposed in Q.7, or any other options which may be proposed. The remainder of our answer to this question makes clear the issues and concerns upon which we require clarity before we could make any such decision or endorsement.

Whatever the eventual number of unitary councils, the framework chosen should:

- **Provide clear, reasoned articulations of both the sources of all future revenues (and to whom they will be allocated) and how they are being directly mapped against all existing higher authority services and activities.**
- **Not lead to the further diminution, or removal, of services due to an absence of adequate funding.**
- **Provide a far closer day-to-day relationship between the unitary council and town/parish councils; they understand their communities in the way large, higher-level authorities never can.**
- **Provide town and parish councils with reasonable access to non-elected civil service implementation experts, not just elected policy and budget-setting officials.**
- **Provide the same (or improved) unitary ward councillor-to-residents ratio.**
- **Clarify how the debts of badly run councils under the existing structure will be serviced and repaid. The Council would be concerned if the burden falls on those new authorities which happen to include the indebted areas.**

Although not part of this consultation, the Council would like clarity on how the current arrangements used by town and parish councils to request and collect their precepts will be altered, if at all.

To gain confidence in any proposals, the Council will need much more information about how the services and activities of the existing higher authorities will be safeguarded against further cuts, together with more substantive evidence in terms of how the changes will generate meaningful improvements. Without such visibility the Council currently finds it difficult to visualise a situation where the proposed changes will translate into tangibly better outcomes for all its parishioners.

Due to current lack of information, we are unable to make fully formed assessments of the outcomes of introducing the new structure to:

- (a) deliver benefits to the area,
- (b) support the economy of the area,
- (c) improve social outcomes in the area,
- (d) improve local government services in the area (the outcome may well be the reverse),
- (e) improve the local natural environment and overall national environment, or
- (f) support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities (again, the reverse may be an unintended consequence).

Without more information the Council's is currently unable to offer a more positive assessment of the proposals. A key factor in helping the Council (and no doubt other lower tier councils) to further consider the proposals will be to ensure there is active engagement with it during the restructuring formulation period, and it welcomes any and all future opportunities to contribute to the process by lending its expertise to identify the desired outcomes for itself and the parishioners it represents.

Section 4: Your Story / Your View

11. Can you tell us something about your local area, or your local council, that made a difference to you – good or bad?

Our response to Question 10 gives an indication of our concerns in various areas. In particular, as a parish council we have been struck by how, in future, because of higher authorities' financial constraints, if they are to be maintained, it is likely certain services will have to be delivered by town and parish councils if they are not to disappear altogether.

12. How would you describe your local area or neighbourhood to someone who has never been there?

Ours is a rural parish which has seen a general, gradual diminution in services over the last 25 years or so, e.g. restricted access now to public transport – the majority of our residents now find it difficult to live in our parish without access to a car. And by having to drive, they then encounter their neighbourhood roads which are not adequately maintained. We have concerns that a more urban-centric unitary authority (Chelmsford/Brentwood/Maldon), and indeed the new mayoral entity, would introduce a further lack of understanding of the requirements of Essex's more rural parishes.

Our parishioners see just 5% of their Council Tax go to the parish council, the representative body closest to the community. With that fraction we have to maintain and administer recreation grounds, allotment sites and other services and activities which directly and demonstrably contribute to our parishioners' health and well-being. We believe that for many parishioners the linkage between what they pay as Council Tax and the delivery of local services and improvements by higher authorities can seem tenuous, so any increased burden on parish councils without a commensurate financial uplift, or some guarantee of improved services from higher authorities, would only exacerbate this sense of not receiving value for money for the other 95%.

Section 5: About you (Optional)

This last part of our survey asks for some information about you. These questions are not designed to identify you, but to help us make sure a good spread of our residents and stakeholders take the opportunity to have their say about changes to councils across Greater Essex.

The information you give us will be treated in the strictest confidence and your responses will not be linked to you as an individual. All these questions are optional.

Please answer the questions below by ticking the boxes that you feel most describe you. Some questions may feel personal, but any information that you give will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be used only to help us to improve our services. It will not be linked to you as an individual. You do not have to fill this in, but it will help us if you do.

13. Is this a personal response, or are you responding on behalf of an organisation?

Submitting your own personal response

Responding on behalf of an organisation

14. What is your age?

No response.

This question is optional, you do not have to say if you prefer not to.

15. To which gender do you identify?

No response.

This question is optional, you do not have to say if you prefer not to.

16. What is your ethnic group?

Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background

No response.

17. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

This question is optional, you do not have to say if you prefer not to.

No response.

Thank you for taking the time to help shape our Local Government Reorganisation proposal.

The following councils are working together as a group to prepare a proposal for 5 new unitary authorities for Greater Essex:

Basildon Council

Brentwood Borough Council

Castle Point Borough Council

Chelmsford City Council

Colchester City Council

Maldon District Council

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Uttlesford District Council