

Consultation response from Castle Point Borough Council to the Local Government Boundary Commission's review of the electoral arrangements of Essex County Council - Initial consultation stage

July 2023

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This consultation response has been prepared by Castle Point Borough Council ('the Council') and at the Ordinary Council meeting on 26 July 2023 received formal approval for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England ('the Commission').
- 1.2 The response covers two aspects. The first relates to the council size proposal for 77 county councillors as decided by the Commission on 28 March 2023. The second relates to the communities in Castle Point and is intended to assist the Commission when deciding on the new pattern of electoral divisions.
- 1.3 The Council understands that further to resolution at Essex County Council's (ECC) Council meeting on 11 July 2023, ECC will be writing to the Commission to request that the number of county councillors under new arrangements is increased to 78 from the 77 proposed in their original submission about council size. This further increase in county councillor numbers is supported by the Council, especially in light of wording in ECC's submission about council size and the proposal to remove one county councillor from the Castle Point Borough. The Council hopes that changes to ECC's position have been made in order to avoid the need to remove one county councillor from Castle Point. However, this is not guaranteed and so this consultation response sets out a number of reasons why such a proposal would not work.

2. Council size proposal

- 2.1 The submission from ECC proposes (on page 28) to increase the number of councillors by one in each of Harlow, Maldon and Uttlesford and to remove one councillor from Castle Point.
- 2.2 The argument for this relates to addressing electoral inequality in Harlow, Maldon and Uttlesford due to predicted future housing growth and, conversely, that because of the low level of housing growth in Castle Point, the number of county councillors representing electors in the Borough can fall from 5 to 4 councillors.

Variance from the average

- 2.3 Analysis of variance from the average number of electors per councillors has been undertaken and is available to download from the Commission's website. This analysis has been done on an electoral division basis and reveals areas of electoral inequality both within and across district-level areas in the administrative county of Essex.

- 2.4 The Council has used this data to carry out an analysis of variance from average electorate per councillor on a district basis. The analysis looks at the position in 2022 and in 2029 assuming the number of councillors remains at the current 75 county council. The analysis then also looks at the impact on electoral equality with the addition of one county councillors in each of Harlow, Maldon and Uttlesford, together with the removal of one county councillor in Castle Point. Table 1 below shows this analysis. Numbers highlighted in yellow are where the variance is more than +/- 10% from the average.

Table 1 – Analysis of variance from average electorate per councillor by district-level council

Council	District-level variance from average electorate for cllr in 2022	District-level variance from forecast average electorate for cllr in 2029	District-level variance from forecast average electorate for cllr in 2029 if proposed additions / reductions to no. of cllrs is implemented
Basildon	3%	2%	
Braintree	-3%	-4%	
Brentwood	0%	3%	
Castle Point	-7%	-12%	13% (with -1 county councillor)
Chelmsford	-2%	-2%	
Colchester	2%	1%	
Epping Forest	-6%	-6%	
Harlow	7%	18%	-3% (with +1 county councillor)
Maldon	13%	17%	-10% (with +1 county councillor)
Rochford	-9%	-12%	
Tendring	-2%	-3%	
Uttlesford	17%	19%	-2% (with +1 county councillor)

Note: Source data downloaded from <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/essex>
Electoral Figures (updated 4 April 2023)

- 2.5 When looking forward to 2029, Harlow, Maldon and Uttlesford (as a result of forecast housing growth) have significantly more electors per councillor than the average for the county. Both Castle Point and Rochford have the lowest number of electors per county councillor both in 2022 and when forecasting to 2029.
- 2.6 Whilst the proposal to increase the number of county councillors in areas where the number of electors per county councillor is already higher than average and exacerbated by forecast housing growth to 2029, the impact of removing one county councillor from Castle Point is a significant swing from 12% less than the average electors per councillors to 13% more than the average electors per councillor. In other words, moving from over-representation to under-representation in Castle Point. Furthermore, Rochford is left unchanged and remains with the lowest number of electors per county councillor in 2029 (and at the same percentage from the average as Castle Point remaining with 5 county councillors).

Impact on a division-by-division basis

- 2.7 If the recommendation were made to remove one councillor from Castle Point, there is a significant challenge deciding which existing division to remove that councillor from due to the impact on electoral equality within the Castle Point Borough. Table 2 below shows the variance on a division-by-division basis in 2022 and when the electorate is forecast to 2029. Numbers highlighted in yellow are where the variance is more than +/- 10% from the average and those highlighted in red where the variance is more than +/- 20% from the average.

Table 2 - Analysis of variance from average electorate per councillor by division in Castle Point

Name of division	Number of cllrs per division	Electorate 2022	Variance 2022	Electorate 2029	Variance 2029
Canvey Island East	1	15,060	1%	15,840	-4%
Canvey Island West	1	14,123	-5%	14,681	-11%
Hadleigh	1	14,365	-4%	15,059	-9%
South Benfleet	1	13,514	-9%	14,155	-14%
Thundersley	1	12,259	-18%	12,920	-22%

Note: Source data downloaded from <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/essex>
Electoral Figures (updated 4 April 2023)

- 2.8 Presently, all but Canvey Island East division have a lower-than-average number of electors per county councillor. By 2029, all divisions will have a lower-than-average number of electors per county councillor, with the largest variances in South Benfleet and Thundersley.
- 2.9 Removing one county councillor from Canvey Island would result in a single county councillor representing over 30,500 electors (90% higher than – almost double – the countywide average number of electors per county councillor). Removing one county councillor from the rest of the Borough also leaves each of the two remaining county councillors representing over 21,000 electors (31% higher than the countywide average number of electors per county councillor).
- 2.10 Other patterns of new divisions – with 4 rather than the current 5 divisions – present the same problem the Council encountered in its own review of not having divisions which take in parts of Canvey Island and the mainland (i.e. with the creek running down the middle). This point about communities is made in more detail later in this submission.

3. Communities in Castle Point

- 3.1 The Castle Point Borough is made up of four distinct urban settlements, each with their own identities; Canvey Island, South Benfleet, Hadleigh and Thundersley. Any division patterns should be based around these four areas as residents most closely identify with these. Furthermore, Canvey Island is distinct from the mainland, with a hard border formed by Benfleet Creek, and both from a practical and community perspective a division including part of Canvey Island and South Benfleet would not work.
- 3.2 There are three caravan/mobile home parks in the Borough – Kingsleigh Park, Kings Park Village and Sandy Bay Park/Thorney Bay Park – where there is potential for housing units to be moved within the boundaries of these sites and so proposed divisional boundaries should not run through these sites.
- 3.3 Further to the Commission's review of Castle Point's electoral arrangements, due for implementation from May 2024, there is an opportunity to adjust the existing divisional boundaries of Canvey Island, South Benfleet, Hadleigh and Thundersley divisions to create coterminous boundaries with the new wards in Castle Point to help support effective and convenient local government as well as potentially to help correct current and forecast variances from the average electors per councillor.

4. Conclusion and summary

- 4.1 The number of county councillors representing the Castle Point Borough should remain at five for the following reasons:
- 1) The variance from the forecast average electorate per county councillor in 2029 is -12% for both Castle Point Borough and the Rochford District, yet there is no proposal from Essex County Council to remove one county councillor from the Rochford District;

- 2) The proposal to remove one county councillor in the Castle Point Borough results in 18,164 electors per county councillor by 2029 which is 13% higher than the average forecast number of electors (16,054) per county councillor across the county of Essex;
- 3) The drawing of new divisional boundaries in the Castle Point Borough with four county councillors presents significant challenge in order to arrive at electoral equality across four divisions, not least because of the hard boundary between Canvey Island and the rest of the Borough:
 - a) Removal of one county councillor from Canvey Island would result in one county councillor representing an electorate of over 30,500 by 2029 (90% higher than – almost double – the countywide average number of electors per county councillor);
 - b) Redistribution of electors in the rest of the Borough across two county council divisions would result in each county councillor representing an electorate of over 21,000 (31% higher than the countywide average number of electors per county councillor).

4.2 The following points should be noted about the communities in the Castle Point Borough when designing a new divisional pattern as part of the review:

- 4) There are four distinct urban settlements, each with their own identities; Canvey Island, South Benfleet, Hadleigh and Thundersley. Any division patterns should be based around these four areas as residents most closely identify with these;
- 5) New divisional boundaries should not run through the caravan/mobile home sites in the Borough as there is potential for homes to be moved within the boundaries of these sites; and
- 6) New divisional boundaries should, wherever possible, be coterminous with the new Castle Point Borough Council ward boundaries from May 2024.

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