



MINUTES

Meeting: EXTRAORDINARY
PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 5th January 2026

Time: 7.30PM

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (7) Cllr Clegg (Meeting Chairman), Cllr Spearman, Cllr Blanks, Cllr Mrs Jackman, Cllr Irvine, Cllr Lambert, Cllr Stroud

Officers in Attendance (2)

Susan De Luca, Parish Clerk
Adriana Jones – Principal Finance Officer

Members of the Public (5) – Inc EFDC Cllrs C Whitbread, Burrows and Bromwich

Members of the Press (1)

C25.163 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (7)

Apologies received from Cllr Buckley, Cllr Bedford, Cllr Mrs Etherington, Cllr Mrs Hawkins, Cllr Tyler, Cllr Kinnear and Cllr Ms Wood.

C25.164 OTHER ABSENCES (1)

Cllr Born.

C25.165 MINUTES

Councillors **AGREED** the minutes of the Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting held on 15th December 2025.

C25.166 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

C25.167 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Two members of the public were present, however there were no questions.

C25.168 DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

On 19th November 2025, the Government launched its public consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals, asking members of the public and interested parties for their opinions. The consultation specifically wants responses from Parish and Town Councils. The consultation ends on 11th January 2026. An Extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council was held on 15th December 2025 to consider the matter, however it was agreed to hold a further meeting on 5th January 2026 to further consider the matter, to which the District Councillors would be asked to attend and explain their rationale for a 3 Tier proposal.

The PFO provided a brief summary of the proposal, which included the pros and cons of each. EFDC Cllrs Chris Whitbread, Tom Bromwich and Les Burrows were in attendance. Cllr Whitbread addressed Councillors setting out that he was fortunate in that he had been in all the meetings / discussions on Unitary Councils from day 1, so he has seen the emergence of each of the different options, and has looked at it from both the Leader of EFDCs perspective and from ECC perspective. Cllr Whitbread stated

that being involved in the County Council had allowed him the chance to understand the complexity of this process, specifically in terms of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, stating this is where the majority of ECC budget is spent (around 80% of spend). The more you break-up the county, the harder it will be to delivery these two vital services. Cllr Whitbread stated that this was his biggest issue with the 5 tier proposal – the concern that it could not sustainably deliver these services.

Cllr Whitbread addressed the 3 tier proposal supported by EFDC, ECC and Braintree DC, setting out it was a very balanced approach. He stated that some held a view that having smaller unitaries would mean them being closer to communities locally, however whichever option was agreed would mean creating a larger Council that residents were currently used to, so there would be degree of separation regardless. He stated that the Government was very wedded to Neighbourhood Development Committees (NDCs) but say very little about Parish / Town Councils, but they are keen to ensure these NDCs support a local role as part of the new unitary authorities. The 3 tier proposal really does flesh out how the NDCs could work for our area, setting out what they could achieve and example areas.

Cllr Whitbread addressed the matter of debt, stating that the total debt across the whole of greater Essex was around £4bn, and that debt would be an issue for all the proposals, however the 3 tier system factors the debt much more evenly across the county than perhaps the other proposals. Every district and borough in Essex has a degree of debt, with debt spread across the whole of Essex, not only Thurrock. The Government has made some indication it will help with the Thurrock debt, the there has been no firm proposal or answer at this time.

Cllr Irvine stated that he understood the Government were looking at Local Government Reorganisation from a cost saving perspective, saying they wanted to achieve efficiencies, but he saw it as a 'bangs for bucks' situation, and asked Cllr Whitbread what the 'bangs for bucks' was with the 3 tier model. Cllr Irvine also set out that he simply could not understand why anybody was contemplating an option which had a 51 year pay back. Cllr Whitbread stated that a lot of what will happen will be based on the transformation that every council will have to go through, and even at this time ECC was going through a transformation regime looking to save £100m by 2030. Each of the proposals presented has to address the transformation costs. There are bigger savings on the 3 tier model, and there is a quicker payback, which would be expected given there are 16 chief executives going down to 3 as a starting point. Cllr Whitbread stated that it was concerning the number of Councils which were facing section 114 notices, and that local government needed to get back onto a more stable footing. Cllr Irvine also addressed the matter of redundancies, with this being focussed on losing the 'chiefs'. Cllr Whitbread stated this was a big part of it, however there were other savings that would be made. For example, there were currently numerous waste and leisure contracts across the county, and this would be an opportunity to save, albeit savings wouldn't happen overnight.

Cllr Blanks asked Cllr Whitbread to what extent politics had played a part his choice of proposal, to which he replied that from his perspective it hadn't. Cllr Whitbread stated that if you looked at the makeup of the 3 tier proposals, these wouldn't necessarily be his political choice. Cllr Blanks set out that if you take every one of the 14 councils, there are 622 Councillors, of which 33% are Conservative, however if you look at ECC, 66% are conservative, and that this seemed as though ECC had a bigger say. Cllr Whitbread disagreed, stating that he had waited until he had seen all the evidence before deciding which position he would take, and he paid tribute to all the Councils that had been involved in the process stating all had handled the matter very professionally. There had been disagreement and fraught discussion, however going forward we would all have to work together. Cllr Whitbread set out his position on the different proposals from a political perspective, stating that he was trying to find the

most effective way to make Great Essex work, and that everybody should be focussed on this. We needed to be looking at new efficiencies and transformation and the best way to achieve this.

Cllr Clegg asked Cllr Bromwich and Cllr Burrows for their views. Cllr Bromwich stated that he went into the meeting intent on voting for the 3 tier model, thinking that the arguments he had heard at that time seemed sound, however when others spoke about it and resident concerns were raised, he started to change his view towards the 5 tier proposal. Cllr Bromwich stated that at this stage everything was hypothetical, however from the arguments he heard, a 5 tier model made more sense as the smaller an authority is, the more likely you will get change for your area. For example, social care, planning, highways – having smaller authorities will result in officers that know the area better. Cllr Bromwich said he didn't feel confident that somebody in Maldon would have a clear understanding of the issues in Woodside for example. Another concern he had was about Epping Forest's identity, stating that there was perhaps more of a fraternal identity with Harlow, Uttlesford and perhaps Brentwood, but Maldon is a wild card that doesn't make much sense in the proposal. He was also concerned that with the 3 tier model, much of the money would go to the larger cities, with Epping Forest being somewhat left behind.

Cllr Burrows stated that he supported the 3 tier model, however expressed concern as to how Planning would operate in any of the proposals, stating that the Government needed to step up and fund some the change that his needed. He was also concerned that the Government would do what they wanted in any case.

The Chairman thanked the District Councillors present and for giving their views.

The PFO read through the questions that were being asked as part of the consultation. Councillors discussed the different proposals, in the first case eliminating both of the 4 tier proposals. This left the 5 tier proposal and 3 tier proposals. As a general principle, many Councillors could understand the geographical make up with the 5 tier proposal, which would see Epping Forest District merged with Harlow and Uttlesford. However, it was clear that the 3 tier proposal seemed to make the most financial sense. Cllr Lambert stated that 5 provides more local services, but would be more expensive. Cllr Lambert suggested that it would make sense to go with a 3 tier proposal, but perhaps the makeup of the tiers could be changed, swapping Maldon with Uttlesford. Cllr Whitbread stated that this option was originally explored. Cllr Stroud set out that if we looked at this as a business, we would want a return on investment, and that we need to understand how much it would cost to serve the customer (our residents), and the cheaper we could do this whilst providing a good service level, should be the best option.

Cllr Lambert set out that from the discussion so far, what he could see was that the main objection with the 3 tier proposal was that Uttlesford were not with Epping Forest and that Maldon did not fit well. Cllr Lambert formally **PROPOSED** this Council should support a 3 tier model, but a model which grouped Epping Forest, Harlow, Uttlesford, Brentwood and Chelmsford together. This was **SECONDED** by Cllr Spearman. A vote was taken, the result of which was as follows:

6 – for
1 – against –(Cllr Blanks)

It was **AGREED** the Clerk would respond to the consultation in accordance with this decision.

Meeting closed 8.31pm

Signed

Date