

Uttlesford District Council Meeting

22 April 2025

Responses to Written Questions to Members of the Executive and Committee Chairs

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1. By Councillor Sell to Councillor Neil Reeve – Portfolio Holder for the Environment:

“What actions can the Council take with its partners Essex Highways and the Highways Agency to deal with the increasing problem of litter on roadside verges?”

Response from Councillor Neil Reeve:

“Thank you for your question. This is a matter that requires continuous effort. Members will have noticed a general reduction in roadside litter over the last months.

I would like to thank all those Parish Councils who have arranged ‘litter-picks’ at this time of year. This is greatly valued and this really helps to improve the appearance of local communities.

UDC takes litter responsibility rather than Essex Highways or the Highways Agency (apart from on the M11). We continue to work with Essex Highways and the Highways Agency to discharge our duties in relation to litter on a major trunk road. Our operation must be undertaken safely, and our priority is always focussed on the safety of our staff and road users. We will continue to pursue Essex Highways and the Highways Agency to carry out their duties.”

2. By Councillor Sell to Councillor Lees – Leader of the Council:

“What are the advantages and disadvantages to Uttlesford residents of this council merging with Harlow District Council?”

Response from Councillor Lees:

“It’s not really helpful to talk about Uttlesford merging with Harlow District Council, as there is no possible model on the table that would allow for solely an Uttlesford/Harlow merger. Harlow does not border with Uttlesford, so it is inevitable that Harlow will merge with at least Epping Forest District Council, as well of course with those elements of Essex County Council disaggregated to that area. Harlow at about the same population as Uttlesford at c95,000 and Epping at c135,000 is nowhere near big enough to form a new unitary under the Government requirements, so it is more a matter of Epping+Harlow+parts of Essex County Council+one or more others.

There is a realistic prospect of Uttlesford, Epping, Harlow and parts of Essex County Council merging under a five unitary model, which is the in principle preference of Uttlesford councillors, enjoying at least some cross party support. Alternative models include two unitaries (of which the most likely model would be a North Essex merger of Epping, Harlow, Uttlesford, Braintree, Colchester, Tendring, Chelmsford and Maldon plus large parts of ECC at well over 1 million population) – or three unitaries (which might see some huge combination like Epping, Harlow, Uttlesford, Chelmsford, and Brentwood plus large parts of ECC) - or a four unitary model (which might be something like Uttlesford, Braintree, Colchester, Tendring and big parts of ECC). There are something like 19 different alignment models under the two, three, four or five unitary configuration options. Work is now commencing across the 15 authorities to develop business cases for competing models – including an options analysis contrasting the relative merits between different alignments – though this simply for sheer volume of work is not going to be able to be done 19 times over for 19 different models (or indeed any more that may emerge on top of those 19).

I can say very clearly why I think that a five new unitary model will be better for Uttlesford residents than a model of four, three or even two unitaries, and that is because local government should be local. Putting Uttlesford’s c95,000 residents under a vast council stretching miles and miles away across the county, and including not only one but potentially two cities, would massively enhance the risk of our residents’ interests being the poor relation, distant and forgotten. That is why I think it would be better for Uttlesford to be part of one of five unitary councils, each of them smaller, such as covering Uttlesford, Epping and Harlow. Harlow is a very different place to Uttlesford, but then so is Chelmsford and so is Colchester, and of all the 19 different alignment models, when you factor in travel to work patterns, road and rail connections, NHS services and so on, I think that an Uttlesford, Epping and Harlow configuration is likely the most intuitive and sensible.”

3. Question withdrawn.

4. By Councillor Dean to Councillor Lees – Leader of the Council:

“How much money has the Council asked Central Government for local government reorganisation?”

Response from Councillor Lees:

“I’d refer Cllr Dean for the answer to his question to the motion we all [debated and voted on 19th March](#), at which full Council approved that I should add my name alongside ultimately all 15 leaders of Essex Councils, which included a list of 11 explicit asks of Government. The third of those eleven requests he will perhaps recall was:

“Capacity funding support – the government is well aware that the costs of undertaking the preparatory work to support local government reorganisation in a place as complex as Essex are considerable. We estimate the costs across the system to be between £5m to £7.5m and we are seeking support from government to fully fund those costs. They come on top of existing service pressures and are likely an understatement of the true costs of undertaking this work as no account has been factored in for the leadership time and other opportunity costs we are absorbing.”

We have not yet had an answer to these requests from Government.”