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POINTS OF VIEW

It may not be the election on your mind, but make your vote count

LET'S talk about elections. Not the big one that's on everyone's mind at the moment – you know, the one where we elect our members of parliament and will probably lead to a change of government. That's the general election.

It's coming up at some point this year, although strangely and perhaps embarrassingly for the so-called 'mother of all parliaments,' we STILL don't know when it's going to happen.

We do know it has to be before the end of January 2025, but other than that, your guess is as good as mine. Only the Prime Minister gets to decide when it comes and he's being pretty tight-lipped about it.

No, I'm talking about the myriad of other elections that are taking place across the country on 2nd May.

Knocking on doors as I do regularly across Chelmsford, I've met quite a few voters who were confused about this. Some have even thought the polling card they've recently received is for the general election, which isn't the case. So let me explain what's going on.

Here in Chelmsford, it's pretty simple. The only election we've got happening in three weeks' time is the one to elect the next Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC). This is a role performed by one person (currently a Conservative called Roger Hirst) for the whole of Essex. If you're registered to vote, you should have already received your polling card, which is now in the form of a letter rather than a card. If you haven't registered to vote, you'd better hurry up – the deadline for registering to vote for this election is just a few days away, on Tuesday 16th April.

You can register to vote here: www.gov.uk/register-to-vote.

Many other places around the country, including here in Essex, have additional local elections. Take, for example, neighbouring Brentwood Borough Council. As well as the PFCC election, voters in Brentwood are being asked to elect all the councillors on the council. These are called 'all-up' (sometimes 'all-out') elections because all the council-



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lors are up for election at the same time. In Chelmsford, we're used to that – it happens every four years for Chelmsford City Council, and also every four years for Essex County Council (alternating every two years, leap-frog style, with Chelmsford City Council elections). But in Brentwood, it's unusual.

Brentwood, like many other councils, usually elects in thirds. That means that every year for three years, a third of their councillors are up for election, followed by a

fallow year – a year without any elections – which is usually when the county council elections take place. But this year, they're having all-ups. That's because there's been a boundary review, meaning the shapes and sizes of the council wards have been checked to ensure they still make sense, taking into account any new housing developments etc. Because some of the boundaries have changed, they need to elect councillors into the newly defined council wards.

Other places around the country will also be electing councillors. Some will also be electing mayors – not the sort of ceremonial-only mayor that Chelmsford has, but what's called 'metro mayors' that are

given real democratic power in the area where they are elected. That includes London, where voters will be choosing whether to re-elect Sadiq Khan as mayor, or someone else. London voters will also be electing members of the London Assembly.

This is a really big set of elections. Across the country, more than 2,600 councillors and 10 metro mayors are up for election. The last time these elections were held was in 2021 (delayed from 2020 due to the pandemic).

This is the last set of elections before the general election so the results will be very closely watched and scrutinised as political campaigners, analysts and pundits try to

work out what it could tell us about the possible outcome of the general election. Turnout in local elections is traditionally very low, so it will be interesting to see whether that changes with a general election just around the corner.

I'm looking forward to seeing the results come in on election night as we edge closer and closer to a general election.

You can always find out more about the elections where you are by checking on your local council's website. In Chelmsford, you can find more details here: www.chelmsford.gov.uk/voting-and-elections/upcoming-elections.

Don't forget to get out there and make your vote count.