

# Interim polling places review 2022

<b>Report number:</b>	<b>COU/WS/22/024</b>	
<b>Report to and date:</b>	<b>Council</b>	13 December 2022
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**Decisions Plan:** **Not applicable as this is not an executive matter**

**Wards impacted:** **All wards**

**Recommendations:** **It is recommended that the Council:**

- 1. Agrees to the commencement of an interim review of polling places, as set out in section 2 of Report number: COU/WS/22/024.**
- 2. The Chief Executive, as Returning Officer, be authorised to approve the amended scheme of polling places, following consultation on proposals with electors and other interested persons and bodies, including elected representatives and those with expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people.**

## **1. Context to this report**

- 1.1 The Elections Act 2022 introduces changes which impact the voting process at polling stations and as a result the Electoral Services Team has undertaken an audit of polling station facilities to make sure they comply.
- 1.2 The feedback gathered has identified some polling stations which are not available on 4 May 2023 and some polling stations which do not provide electors with reasonable facilities for voting or are not accessible to electors who are disabled. The list of polling stations is included at Appendix A.
- 1.3 As a result, an interim polling places review is required and will be focussed only on changes to the polling scheme where venues are no longer available or suitable. The aims of this tailored review will be to:
- Seek to ensure that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
  - Ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place is accessible to electors who have a disability.
- 1.4 This is not a statutory review and therefore will not look at all polling places or polling district boundaries as they will be subject to a full review, as required by law, to be completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- 1.5 Glossary of terms used in this report:
- Polling District - a geographical subdivision of an electoral area, for example a District/Parish Ward, within which a polling place is designated.
  - Polling Place – an area or building in which polling stations are located, and which can be as wide as a whole polling district.
  - Polling Station – the actual building in which voting takes place.

## **2. Proposals within this report**

- 2.1 Council approval is requested to commence an interim review of those polling places that are not available or suitable for continued use as a polling station. The timetable for the review is set out below:
- 13 December 2022: Council approval to undertake an interim review
  - 16 December 2022: Publication of notice of review and recommendations for consultation

- 16 December 2022 – 27 January 2023: Review consultation period
- 10 February 2023: Approval and publication of revised polling places by the Returning Officer

2.2 Given the timescales involved with preparing for the May 2023 elections, Council is requested to authorise the Returning Officer to approve the amended scheme of polling places. The scheme will be considered by the Returning Officer following consultation on proposals with electors and other interested persons and bodies, including elected representatives and those with expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people.

2.3 As Returning Officer, the Chief Executive has a statutory duty to ensure free and fair elections. In discharging these duties, the Returning Officer will take account of the consultation responses but will retain the right to make changes if a polling station is deemed unsuitable for accessibility reasons. The Returning Officer will seek to consult the relevant ward members regarding any such changes.

### **3. Alternative options that have been considered**

3.1 Some venues are no longer available or have been deemed unsuitable therefore there is no alternative option to undertaking an interim polling place review.

### **4. Consultation and engagement undertaken**

4.1 Consultation on proposals will be undertaken with electors and other interested persons and bodies, including elected representatives and those with expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people. The consultation period will be from 16 December 2022 – 27 January 2023.

4.2 The Council will publish all consultation response received alongside the new scheme of polling places.

### **5. Risks associated with the proposals**

5.1 If suitable venues are not secured for use as polling stations, then voters may be disenfranchised and there is a risk of an election petition.

5.2 If polling station venues are not accessible to disabled electors, then this may be a breach relating to accessibility under the Equalities Act 2010 and the Election Act 2022.

## **6. Appendices referenced in this report**

- 6.1 Appendix A – list of polling places to be included as part of the interim review

## **7. Background documents associated with this report**

- 7.1 [Polling place reviews | Electoral Commission guidance](#)