

Polling district and polling place review

Report number:	COU/WS/23/016	
Report to and date:	Council	26 September 2023
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Decisions Plan: **Not applicable as this is not an executive matter**

Wards impacted: **All**

Recommendation: **It is recommended that Council:**

- 1. Approves that the compulsory polling district and places review commences on Monday 2 October 2023.**
- 2. Approves the outline timetable and approach to the review as set out in Report number: COU/WS/23/016 and at Appendix A.**

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district.

The following definitions may help to explain the requirements:

- “Polling districts” are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
- “Polling places” are the buildings or areas designated by the council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.
- “Polling stations” are the number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place.

- 1.2 The Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended, introduced a duty on all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years. The next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

- 1.3 The intention of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 was for reviews to be completed by the January before a UK parliamentary general election. However, since the repeal of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011, there is no longer any certainty as to when the next general election will be.

- 1.4 In addition, the Boundary Commission for England has completed a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries and published its final recommendations. It is expected that the Orders for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries will be made by 1 November 2023 and that the new boundaries will be used for the next general election.

- 1.5 As a result of this, it is important that the polling district and places review is carried out as early as possible so that the Council has agreed polling districts and polling places to be used for the next parliamentary election, which must take place before 28 January 2025, as well as the scheduled Police and Crime Commissioner elections which will be held in May 2024.

2. Proposals within this report

- 2.1 The review itself cannot commence earlier than 2 October 2023 but there is work which can and has been undertaken prior to the review.
- 2.2 It would be desirable for any changes in polling districts to be reflected in the electoral register published on 1 December 2023.

However, to ensure sufficient time is included in the timetable for consultation and decision making it is unlikely that the review will be complete until January 2024.

2.3 Ordinarily this would mean that the electoral register would need to be republished in early 2024 to take account of any changes to polling districts. However, as a by-election has been held during the annual canvass the Electoral Registration Officer may extend the canvass period beyond 1 December and delay publication of the revised register up to 1 February at the latest.

2.4 Taking the above into account, it is recommended that the outline timetable and approach to the review, as detailed below is approved:

Review of polling districts and places 2023	Dates
Council meeting to consider commencement of review and draft proposals for consultation	26 September
Notice of review and proposals published and commencement of formal consultation period.	2 October 2023
End of formal consultation	10 November 2023
Consider responses	By 24 November 2023
Final proposals published via meeting agenda papers and website	11 December 2023
Council meeting to consider the revised polling districts and polling places	19 December 2023
Publish electoral register	1 February 2024
Scheduled elections on new polling districts, places, and stations scheme	2 May 2024

2.5 Detailed below is a summary of the activities completed before the official commencement of the review on 2 October.

- Assessment of the final constituency proposals published by the Boundary Commission to understand the impact on polling districts and polling places.
- Liaising with electoral software suppliers about structuring the electoral register to accommodate current and future boundary changes.
- Obtaining detailed up to date maps to enable accurate designation of polling district boundaries.
- Identifying organisations with a special interest/expertise in disabled access to consult.
- Compiling details of current polling places with a summary of their suitability.

- Preparing data for the start of the review (electorate figures, turnout from previous elections).
- Checking the continued availability of polling places.
- Reviewing feedback from stakeholders and Polling Station Inspectors at previous elections, with a particular focus on comments relating to the accessibility of polling places.
- Preparing proposed changes and other comments.

2.6 The draft schedule of polling districts and polling places, included at Appendix A to this report, details the current arrangements for polling districts and polling places, the electorate and May 2023 polling station turnout and comments relating to areas that should be considered as part of the review.

3. Alternative options that have been considered

3.1 It would be possible to undertake a review with a longer timetable to be completed by 31 January 2025. However, it is important to carry out the review as early as possible so that Council has agreed polling districts and places in place for the next parliamentary election, whenever that may be, as well as at the scheduled Police and Crime Commissioner election in May 2024.

3.2 It should be noted that whilst Council is required to undertake a full polling district and polling place review every five years it can also complete interim polling district reviews if required, for example if a specific issue arises.

4. Consultation and engagement

4.1 We will undertake a proportionate consultation with stakeholders and those with an interest in the review, including but not limited to:

- Local government electors/residents of the district
- Parish and town councils
- Parish meetings
- District councillors
- County councillors
- Members of Parliament
- Residents Associations
- Local public and voluntary organisations
- Local disability groups
- Polling place venues

4.2 Information about the review, including maps with boundaries and polling places detailed, will be published on the Council's website and will be made available for inspection at West Suffolk House. Public libraries and parish and town councils will also be encouraged to

make information available where facilities are available. Press releases and other publicity will be issued where appropriate.

5. Risks associated with the proposals

- 5.1 If a review is not undertaken then Council will breach the requirement of the Representation of the People Act 1983.
- 5.2 If suitable polling districts are not in place and suitable venues are not secured for use as polling stations, then voters may be disenfranchised and there is a risk of an election petition.
- 5.3 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. Implications arising from the proposals

- 6.2 Legal compliance: The process for a polling district and places review is set out in Schedule A1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

7. Appendices referenced in this report

- 7.1 Appendix A – schedule of polling districts and polling places, including electorate and recent polling station turnout figures and comments regarding potential changes and/or areas to be considered as part of the review.

8. Background documents associated with this report

- 8.1 [Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations | Electoral Commission guidance](#)