

**CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL
GOVERNANCE & ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE
10 DECEMBER 2014**

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

Contact Officers: Lesley Blue (01494 732010)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That members note the requirement for the review of polling districts and polling places**
- 2. That the proposed timetable for carrying out the necessary consultation and consideration of comments and representations is agreed**

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of the new requirement to review UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places and agree the process for undertaking consultation and considering representations received.

Background Information

2. The Electoral and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The next compulsory review must be started and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015 (inclusive).
3. Electors within the District, or within the parliamentary constituency, may make a representation concerning any views regarding the existing structure of polling districts, polling places and access to polling stations.
4. To assist in understanding this report the following definitions may be helpful:

Parliamentary Constituency

5. The area designated by the Boundary Commission which is represented by a Member of Parliament (MP) in the House of Commons. This cannot be changed by the review – it is the division of the constituency into polling districts and places that is under review.

Wards

6. The District is divided into areas known as “Wards” which are represented by District Ward Councillors. Ward boundaries cannot be changed by this review – it is the division of wards into polling districts and polling places that is under review.

Electoral Divisions

7. Similar to District Wards (see above), but defining the areas represented by County Councillors. A current review of Electoral Divisions has an impact on this Review.

Polling Districts

8. A polling district is the area created by the separation of a ward into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is most convenient for the electors

Polling Places

9. A polling place is the area or building in which the number of polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer.

Polling Station

10. A polling station is the room or area in which voting takes place. This must be located within the polling place that has been designated for the particular polling district. The number of polling stations to be accommodated within a polling place is the decision of the (Acting) Returning Officer for the election.

Criteria for Polling Places and Polling Districts

11. As part of the assessment of the suitability of polling district boundaries, the following should be considered:
 - Are the boundaries well defined? For example. Do they follow the natural boundaries of the areas? If not, is it clear which properties belong in the polling district?
 - Are there suitable transport links within the polling district, and how do they relate to the areas of the district that are most highly populated?

- Are there any obstacles to voters crossing the current polling district and reaching the polling place e.g. steep hills, impassable major roads, railway lines, rivers?
12. There are also a number of factors that must be considered when reviewing existing polling places or assessing new polling places, including:
- The location: is it reasonably accessible within the polling district? Does it avoid barriers for the voter such as steep hills, major roads, rivers, etc.? Are there any convenient transport links?
 - Size: if required, can the polling place accommodate more than one polling station? If multiple polling stations are required, is the polling place ample enough to accommodate all voters going into and out of the polling stations, even where there is a high turnout?
 - Suitability: is the building readily available in the event of any unscheduled elections? Is there any possibility that the building may be demolished as part of a new development? Is the building accessible to all those entitled to attend the polling place?
13. The Electoral Commission recognises that the choice of polling station will often be a balance between the quality of the building, in terms of access and facilities, and the proximity of the building to the electors it is intended to serve; and that there may be circumstances where the polling place might fall wholly or partly outside the polling district because suitable alternatives are not available in the relevant area.
14. Although the Council seeks to avoid the use of schools where possible, there may be locations where there are no other suitable premises in the area. For the purposes of elections, the (Acting) Returning Officer is entitled to use free of charge, subject to covering the cost of heating, lighting and caretaking charges, schools maintained or assisted by a local authority as well as those schools that receive grants made up of monies provided by Parliament.
15. In conducting this review, it is proposed that, in order to minimise the risk of long queues at a polling station, as far as possible, that no more than 2500 voters should be assigned to a polling station for local elections. It should be noted that the number of postal voters in each polling district is a relevant consideration in this regard. In the event of a combined and/or Parliamentary Election, given more complex arrangements and higher voter turnout, it may be necessary to review these numbers. In all circumstances, consideration is given to whether a polling place is capable of accommodating more than one polling station if necessary.

The Role of Chief Executive as the (Acting) Returning Officer

16. Whilst it is for the Council to decide on the creation of polling districts and the location of polling places, it is for the (Acting) Returning Officer to decide how many polling stations are required for each polling place. The (Acting) Returning Officer must allocate electors to the polling stations in such manner as he or she thinks most conducive to the smooth running of polling day. The Council must consult the (Acting) Returning Officer as part of the review and the (Acting) Returning Officer must comment during any review on both the existing polling places and polling stations; and on any proposed changes.

Consultation Process

17. Electors in the Constituency and all of the following will be invited to make comments or representations on the designation of polling districts or places.
- The (Acting) Returning Officer for Chesham and Amersham Parliamentary Constituency
 - The Member of Parliament for Chesham & Amersham Parliamentary Constituency
 - Buckinghamshire County Council
 - Buckinghamshire County Councillors representing divisions within Chiltern District
 - Chiltern District Councillors
 - Town and Parish Councils within Chiltern District
 - Registered Political Parties and Election Agents
 - Chiltern Disability Focus Group

Proposed Timetable for Completion of the Review

18. The revised Polling District Places Order must be approved and published by 31 January 2015 to meet the legal duty of completing the review within four years of the last review.

The proposed timetable is as follows:

Notice of Review published (Review begins)	1 December 2014
Contact all consultees	December – via email

Report to Governance & Electoral Arrangements Committee	10 December 2014
Report to Council – outline progress and timetable	6 January 2015
Consultation Responses deadline	9 January 2015
Meeting with Acting Returning Officer regarding consultation responses	TBA – w/c 12 January 2015
Governance & Electoral Arrangements Committee considers consultation responses and make final recommendations to Council	w/c 25 January 2015
Council approves updated Schedules of Polling Districts and Polling Places	25 February 2015
Publication of Review Result	26 February 2015
Publish Revised Electoral Register incorporating any changes and results of mini canvass	1 March 2015

Challenging the Review

19. The Representation of the People Act 1983 makes provision for the Electoral Commission to consider any representations and observations that a Council has failed to conduct a proper review and may direct the relevant Council to make any alterations it sees necessary to the polling places designated by the review. Should a Council fail to make the alterations within two months of the direction being given, the Commission may make the alterations itself.

Action to date

20. **May 2014** – During the European Parliamentary Elections 2014, the role of the Polling Station Inspectors at Chiltern District Council was extended to include responses to specific questions in respect of the polling place review. Inspectors were asked to complete their usual log

books but also respond to questions as stipulated in the Electoral Commission guidance on conducting Polling Place Reviews. This was undertaken for all polling stations in the District. The current list of polling stations is attached at **Appendix 1**.

21. **June – July 2014** – Further to responses received from Polling Station Inspectors and also Polling Station Staff in general on the suitability of individual polling stations, very few polling stations were identified as causing problems within the district due to wrong location. However there were some that could benefit from improved locations, if possible.
22. **November 2014** – The Democratic and Electoral Services team are visiting all polling stations in the District and completing the questionnaire as issued by the Electoral Commission in respect of conducting a Polling Place Review on the suitability and location of all polling stations.
23. **December 2014** – commencement of the Consultation Process and contact with the consultees as listed above. Notice of Review attached at **Appendix 2** is issued.

Next Steps

24. A report on the representations received during the consultation period needs to be considered by the Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee in January to make a final recommendation on the updated Schedules of Polling Districts and Polling Places to Council on 25 February.