



CHILTERN District Council

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES (Incorporating a copy of the report of the Acting Returning Officer)

Summary

Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the District Council is required to undertake a review of parliamentary polling districts and places. 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.

The Review commenced on 2 December 2014 and this report, which is issued by the Acting Returning Officer to inform the District Council in its deliberations, sets out his views as well as the representations received during the public consultation which ended on 9 January 2015. The full timetable is as follows:

Notice of Review published (Review begins)	2 December 2014
Chiltern Disability Focus Group	9 December 2014
Consultation Responses	9 January 2015
Meeting with Returning Officer regarding consultation responses	14 January 2015
Governance & Electoral Arrangements Committee	10 December 2014 and 27 January 2015
Council	25 February 2015
Publication of Review Result (subject to Council)	26 February 2015
Publish Revised Electoral Register incorporating any changes (if necessary)	1 March 2015

The recommendations to be considered by Chiltern District Council at its meeting on 25 February 2015 will be as follows:

That a new Polling District and Polling Places Order be made to incorporate the following changes (subject to any changes to these proposals which may be agreed by the Council) and that the Order take effect on 26 February 2015.

The changes being:

- 1) To designate Little Chalfont Library as the polling place for polling district 'KB'
- 2) To designate Hivings Church Hall as the polling place for polling district 'W'.

To assist in understanding this report the following definitions may be helpful

Parliamentary Constituency

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Electoral Commission has set out guidance to assist in assessing the current arrangements and any proposals for change. 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?

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?

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.

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. In respect of the current locations for polling stations in Chiltern District this includes four schools and of those four schools only two schools close on the day of polling. The other two schools are able to remain open due to separate access to the school premises.

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, 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. This review has also resulted in the recommendation to reduce the number of polling stations within a polling place to avoid potential problems for electors in the event of a high turnout on polling day.

Presiding Officers are encouraged to make comments and observations regarding the suitability of polling stations to which they are allocated and Polling Station Inspectors visited all polling stations during the European Parliamentary Elections in May 2014. Comments have been taken into account when conducting the review.

The Role of the (Acting) Returning Officer

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.

Summary of Consultees

Electors in the Constituency and all of the following were invited to make comments or representations on the designation of polling districts or places.

- The (Acting) Returning Officer for Chesham and Amersham
- The Member of Parliament for Chesham & Amersham
- 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
- South Bucks & Chiltern Access Group

Completion of the Review

The revised Polling District Places Order is required to 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 timetable for the review has slipped slightly, due to increased workload and pressures on the Democratic and Electoral Services Team during 2014 including the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration. The recommendations will be considered by the Governance & Electoral Arrangements Committee before 31 January 2015 but the order requires approval from full Council and therefore this will be presented to Council on 25 February 2015.

Challenging the Review

Although the Electoral Commission has no initial role in the review process itself, it does have an important role in respect of considering representations and observations that a Council has failed to conduct a proper review on one of two grounds:

- That the Council has failed to meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency, or a body of them (i.e. the reasonable requirements of a particular area of the authority have not been satisfactorily met); or
- That the Council has failed to take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place.

Representations based on any other grounds will not be considered by the Commission.

All representations made to the Commission must be made in writing either by post, email or fax and should include the location and any other relevant information, stating specifically why it is inaccessible or does not meet the reasonable requirements of the electors.

Who may make a representation to the Electoral Commission?

Section 18D (1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, sets out who may make representations to the Electoral Commission namely;

- Not less than thirty registered electors in the constituency (although electors registered anonymously cannot make a representation)
- A person (except the (Acting) Returning Officer) who made representations to the council when the review was being undertaken
- Any person who is not an elector within the constituency but who the Electoral Commission feels has sufficient interest in the accessibility of disabled persons in the areas or has particular expertise in relation to the access to premises or facilities of disabled persons

The (Acting) Returning Officer is entitled to make observations on any representations made to the Commission.

What will the Electoral Commission do?

The Electoral Commission is required to consider any representations and observations 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.

Proposals

- Set out in **Appendix 1** are details of the polling stations used at the May 2014 elections with details of the total electorate allocated to each polling station.

Representations

- Set out in **Appendix 2** are the comments and representations received during the public consultation period which ended on 9 January 2015. The ARO's comments are also summarised in this Appendix.