

SUBJECT:	<i>Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>Mike Stannard, Portfolio Holder for Support Services</i>
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Joanna Swift, Head of Democratic & Electoral Services</i>
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WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>The recommendations in this report are not ward specific</i>

Purpose of Report

1. To highlight the requirement for the Council to review the polling districts and polling places within the district, and report on the process for undertaking consultation and considering representations received for the next review.

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 representation is noted.**

Reasons for Recommendations

2. The Council is required by the Electoral and Administration Act 2013 to next review the UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places in its area between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020. Local authorities can also carry out a review of all or some polling districts and polling places at other times.
3. In light of the UKPGE that was held on 8 June 2017 it is considered timely to carry out a review now so that any proposed changes can take effect for future elections.

Content of Report

4. 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.
5. To assist in understanding this report the following definitions may be helpful:

Parliamentary Constituency

6. 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

7. 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

8. Similar to District Wards (see above), but defining the areas represented by County Councillors.

Polling Districts

9. 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

10. 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

11. 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

12. 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?
13. 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?
14. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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

17. 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

18. 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

Proposed Timetable for Completion of the Review

19. The revised Polling District Places Order must be approved and published by 31 January 2020 to meet the legal duty of completing the review every subsequent fifth year.

As detailed in paragraph 2 the proposed timetable is as follows:

Notice of Review published (Review begins) and contact all consultees	19 July 2017
Deadline for receiving public comments and submissions	31 August 2017
Publication of Returning Officer's consultation papers for proposed and existing polling places	25 September
Deadline for receiving public comments and submissions for Returning Officer's consultation papers.	Friday 27 October

Returning Officer's provisional decisions presented to the Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee	November 2017
The Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee makes recommendations to Council concerning the outcome of the review	February 2018
Council approves updated Schedules of Polling Districts and Polling Places	February 2018

Challenging the Review

20. 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

21. **May-June 2017** – During the County Council elections held on 4 May and the UKPGE held on 8 June Polling Station Inspectors and Presiding Officers completed records to assist the review of polling districts and polling places. The current list of polling stations is attached at **Appendix 1**.
22. **August 2017** – commencement of the Consultation Process and contact with the consultees as listed above. The Notice of Review attached at **Appendix 2** was published on 19 July 2017.

Next Steps

23. Following the public consultation on the review the Returning Officer will then publish the consultation papers for the current and proposed polling places. The Returning Officer's provisional decisions will then be presented to the Governance & Electoral Arrangements Committee in November 2017 for consideration. The Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee's final recommendations will then be considered by Full Council on 28 February 2018.

Options

24. The Council is not required to start the next review of polling places and polling districts until 1 October 2018 however it is considered timely to carry out the review earlier to enable the consideration of changes that could improve the accessibility of some polling places.

Corporate Implications

25. Financial – The review will be conducted within existing budgets
26. Legal – The Council has the power to review polling districts and polling places at times other than the compulsory review period.

Links to Council Policy Objectives

27. The proposed review of polling districts and polling places supports the Council's Key Objective: delivering cost-effective, customer focused services.

Background Papers:	None, other than those referred to in the report.
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