

SUBJECT:	<i>Polling District and Polling Places Review</i>
RELEVANT MEMBER	Councillor Diana Varley, Chairman of the Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Joanna Swift, Head of Legal & Democratic Services</i>
REPORT AUTHOR	<i>Mat Bloxham, 01494 732143, mbloxham@chiltern.gov.uk</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>All Wards</i>

1. Purpose of Report

The Council is required under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 to start and complete a UK Parliamentary polling district and polling places review between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020. This report sets out the process and proposed timetable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **To note the requirement to complete a UK Parliamentary polling district and polling places review by 31 January 2020.**
2. **To note the proposed timetable for carrying out the necessary consultation and consideration of comments and representations.**

2. Reasons for Recommendations

There is a legal requirement to complete a review of polling district and polling places before 31 January 2020. Members are asked to note the process and proposed timetable.

3. Content of Report

Previous Review

3.1. The Committee will recall that the Council only recently undertook a review in 2018 to consider changes to polling places ahead of the District and Parish Council elections scheduled to take place on 2 May 2019. That review resulted in the following changes:

- Chalfont St Peter Leisure Centre designated the polling place for polling district 'CN – Gold Hill' instead of Gold Hill Baptist Church.
- Newtown Baptist Church designated the polling place for polling district 'CT- Newtown' and 'CZ – Vale' instead of Newtown County Infant School and Nursery.

- Little Chalfont Methodist Church designated the polling place for polling district 'CR1- Little Chalfont North East' instead of Little Chalfont Primary School.
- Little Kingshill Village Hall continues to be designated the polling place for the polling district 'CS – Little Kingshill & Little Missenden' and also be designated the polling place for 'CVA – Prestwood & Heath End (2)', rather than Little Kingshill Baptist Church.

Consideration was also given to Cholesbury Village Hall being made the polling place for the polling district "CMB - St Leonards" rather than St Leonards Parish Hall. Since the completion of that review we have received representations against this proposal. As such, no change has been made. It is proposed that as part of the forthcoming review that St Leonards Parish Hall continues to be designated as the polling place for CMB – St Leonards.

Elections 2019

- 3.2. Members will also be aware that the Districts of Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe (Changes to Years of Elections) Order 2018 postpones the 2 May 2019 District and Parish Elections to 7 May 2020. In effect the term of office for District and Parish Councillors has been extended by one year.

Background

- 3.3. 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.
- 3.4. 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. These cannot be changed by 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

3.5. 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?

3.6. 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.

- 3.7. 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.
- 3.8. 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

- 3.9. 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.

4. Consultation

Electors in the Constituency and all of the following stakeholders will be invited to make comments or representations on the designation of polling districts or places:

- The (Acting) Returning Officer for Chesham & Amersham Constituency
- The Member of Parliament for Chesham & Amersham Constituency
- Buckinghamshire County Council
- Buckinghamshire County Councillors representing divisions within Chiltern District
- District Councillors
- Town and Parish Councils within Chiltern District
- Registered Political Parties and Election Agents

Sufficient time should be allowed to enable interested persons to read and understand the proposals, gather comments and respond with any alternative arrangements. It is proposed that each consultation stage last for a minimum of 6 weeks.

Proposed Timetable for Completion of the Review

The revised Polling District Places Order must be approved and published by 31 January 2020 to meet the legal requirements.

The proposed timetable is as follows:

Polling District and Place Review 2019 Timetable	
Proceedings	Date
Publication of Notice of Review of Polling Districts and Places	1 February 2019
Deadline for receiving public comments and submissions	15 March 2019
Publication of ARO's report on proposed and existing polling places	TBC April 2019
Deadline for receiving public comments and submissions relating to the ARO's report	TBC June 2019
Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee to consider proposals and agree recommendations	TBC October 2019
Publication of details of the Review setting out reasons for its decisions	TBC November 2019
Publish Revised Electoral Register	1 December 2019

7. Corporate Implications

Financial

There are no resource implications attached to this proposal that will affect budgets.

Legal

The Council has a legal duty to designate polling places for each polling place and to keep those polling places under review. There would be a risk to the Council if it failed to keep to its statutory duty to carry out a review.

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

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

9. Next Steps

The Notice of Review will be published. Following the consultation the Acting Returning Officer will publish a report setting out the existing and proposed polling

places. This will be subject to consultation, and the results of which will be considered by the Governance & Electoral Arrangements Committee in October 2019 when the Committee will agree the final recommendations to be included in the Order.

Background Papers:	Electoral Commission Guidance: Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/electoral-administrator/polling-place-reviews Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/6/contents
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