

**Public**  
**Key Decision - No**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2023

**Meeting/Date:** Corporate Governance Committee – 27th September 2023

**Executive Portfolio:** Councillor M Hassall – Executive Councillor for Corporate and Shared Services

**Report by:** Elections and Democratic Services Manager

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **Executive Summary:**

Each local authority is required to undertake a review of all of the polling districts and polling places in its area on a regular basis. The last full review was undertaken in October 2019. It is now necessary to carry out the next scheduled review which needs to be completed between 1st October 2023 and 31st January 2025. A review is being scheduled to commence on 2nd October 2023 in readiness for the next scheduled elections in May 2024.

### **Recommendation:**

The Committee is

### **RECOMMENDED**

- (a) to note the process involved in the review of polling districts and polling places 2023; and**
- (b) to review the consultation document and authorise the commencement of the polling districts and polling places review in accordance with the consultation document attached and timetable for consultation.**

## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to acquaint members with details of the process involved with a statutory review of polling districts and polling places within the District, including an indicative timetable and proposed amendments to existing arrangements.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Electoral Commission Act 2006, as amended, placed a duty on each authority to undertake a review of all of the polling districts and polling places in its area on a regular basis. The last such review was completed in 2019. It is now necessary to carry out the next scheduled review which needs to be completed between 1st October 2023 and 31st January 2025.
- 2.2 The intention of the legislation was reviews would 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. With a Parliamentary election scheduled within the next 15 months, it is sensible to commence the review as early as possible. In addition, the Boundary Commission for England is currently undertaking a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. The Commission has now published its final recommendations and Orders for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries will be made by 1 November 2023. Once the Orders for new parliamentary constituencies have been made, the new boundaries will be used for the next general election. If a parliamentary by election is called in the meantime, it would be run on existing boundaries.
- 2.3 These issues mean it is important that the polling district and places review is carried out as early as possible, so that Huntingdonshire has agreed polling districts and places to be used for the next parliamentary election, as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024 and has a polling scheme in place which reflects the new constituencies. A review is being scheduled to commence on 2nd October 2023 in readiness.
- 2.4 All wards within Huntingdonshire are divided into polling districts which form the basis upon which the register of electors is produced. Most are defined by parish boundaries, but there are exceptions. The Council is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts and for keeping polling districts under review. The Council must also define a polling place for each of its polling districts within which the polling station is located.
- 2.5 In undertaking the review, the Council must –
- Publish a notice indicating the holding of a review;
  - Consult the Returning Officer for each Parliamentary Constituency which is wholly or partly within its area;

- Enable any such Returning Officer to make representations to the authority and publish them in a prescribed manner;
  - Seek the views of interested groups or bodies including electors, candidates and agents, political parties and members of the Council; and
  - Seek representations from such persons that it thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons with different disabilities.
- 2.6 On completion of the review, the Council is required to give reasons for its decisions in respect of the designation of both polling districts and polling places and publish other such information as prescribed.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 A **polling district** is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, e.g. UK Parliamentary Constituency, a Ward or an Electoral Division. The Council is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts for UK Parliamentary elections and for keeping the polling districts under review. Although there is no requirement to sub-divide local government electoral wards into polling districts, it is recognised good practice to do so. When doing so, every effort must be made to ensure that the polling district scheme for local government elections mirrors as closely as possible that agreed for Parliamentary elections.
- 3.2 In addition, and unless there are special circumstances that lead the Council to determine otherwise, each parish must be in a separate polling district.
- 3.3 A **polling place** is a geographical area in which a polling station is located. However, as there is no legal definition of what a polling place is, the geographical area could be defined as a specific room within a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district.
- 3.4 A **polling station** is the actual area where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district.
- 3.5 It is worth noting that the Council is responsible for designating polling places whereas the Returning Officer is responsible for determining where the polling stations are situated. Whilst polling stations are not formally part of this review, it is essential that the Returning Officer have regard to the adequacy and suitability of premises used.

### 4. AIM OF THE REVIEW

- 4.1 In carrying out this statutory review, the Council must demonstrate that they have, as far as is practicable, met the criteria in the legislation and in doing so must —

- (a) Seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
  - (b) Seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
- 4.2 A schedule of existing polling districts and polling places together with details of existing polling stations used is set out in Appendix A.
- 4.3 It has been the practice to respond to feedback from Presiding Officers and Polling Station Inspectors on the adequacy and suitability of polling stations when elections are held. This is taken into account on an ongoing basis at each scheduled election. In May 2022 Polling Station Inspectors carried out a further survey of all polling stations in the District. The results of the survey will be considered as part of the review. A further survey of polling stations has also been undertaken as part of the accessibility requirement for disabled voters under the Elections Act 2022. The responses to-date are set out in Appendix B.

## **5. CONSULTATION AND TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

- 5.1 As highlighted above, it is important to complete the review as soon as possible, so the polling districts and places for future elections can be agreed in time for the next general election and scheduled elections. The Council is required to undertake a consultation on the existing and any proposed arrangements for polling districts and polling places and that is scheduled to commence on 2nd October 2023, running until 27th November 2023 with all electors and interested parties and the full consultation is hosted on the Council's website. Details will also be sent to all County and District Councillors, MPs and Town and Parish Councils, as well as Returning Officers for the existing Constituencies of Huntingdon and of North West Cambridgeshire, the new Constituency of St Neots and Mid-Cambridgeshire, the Returning Officer for Cambridgeshire County Council, political agents/parties and local disability groups.
- 5.2 A Notice of Polling Districts and Polling Places Review Consultation Document is set out in Appendix C, that provides further detail on the review, proposed changes to existing arrangements and timetable for the review.
- 5.3 Following receipt and consideration of any representations, an outcome report will be presented to this Committee on 24th January 2024 with a recommendation to Council on 21st February 2024 for final proposals for polling districts and polling places and registers will be republished for the affected polling districts on 1st March 2024.

## **6. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 6.1 Failure to consider all representations fully and complete the review to decide on the most appropriate polling districts and polling places may not allow the Returning Officer to run effective elections.

## **7. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- 7.1 The requirement to undertake a polling districts and polling places review aligns with Priority 3: Delivering good quality, high value-for-money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations as set out in the Corporate Plan 2023-2028.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The process for a polling district and places review is set out in Schedule A1, Representation of the People Act 1983 and the next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

## **9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

- 9.1 The Council must undertake a review of the polling district and polling places within a period of 16 months that starts on 1st October of every fifth year after 1st October 2013. The adequacy and suitability of polling stations is regularly reviewed to ensure that premises remain suitable and accessible for electors. The Council is required to approve the Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places to ensure the effective delivery of elections.

- 9.2 The Corporate Governance Committee has responsibility to consider periodic electoral reviews and review of District and Parish electoral arrangements including boundaries and other electoral matters. This report provides the Committee with an opportunity to review the proposed consultation document and propose any changes to be incorporated into the document before the review commences formally in October 2023.

## **10. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix A – Schedule of Existing Polling Districts and Polling Places

Appendix B – Results of Polling Station Accessibility Questionnaire

Appendix C – Notice of Polling Districts and Polling Places Review Consultation Document

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Review of Polling Districts, polling places and polling stations guidance – The Electoral Commission.

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